

6

✽ 逢魔の前奏曲

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Arc 6: Tomorrow Than Today, Yesterday
Than Tomorrow

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Chapter 113: Because I Can't Accept It

The place is the royal castle training ground of Galwark kingdom.

Rio who is holding onto the wooden spear for training was facing against Satsuki.

"Uhm, why do you want to have a match with me ? "

Rio's asking with a wry smile as he is checking the feeling of the short spear in his hand.

"Because I can't take it anymore of course"

Satsuki suddenly replied like that.

Her simple answer isn't relevant to the situation.

So Rio decided to ask another question.

"Uhm, about what ? "

"About you ! "

Satsuki is pointing at Rio while answering his question.

"Haha....."

Rio who is taken aback by her reply was showing a cramped smile on his face.

Satsuki's squinting her eyes and,

"Haruto-kun, I know how much you love Miharu-chan but, I can't just stomach your attitude which is giving up on her from the very beginning. I just can't stomach such a person who is trying to appease themselves by saying "If it's no good, then it's no good". I know you have your own circumstances but, even if I can agree with your reason, my feelings won't allow me to do that ! "

Maybe because she was extremely displeased by his attitude, she told him all of those words in one go while pursing her lips.

"..... So, that brings us to this match ? "

"Right. Too much of thinking won't free me from this gloomy feeling. I'm not

very good in holding back my own feelings, even so, this gloomy feeling won't be cleared up without something acting as a trigger and most likely that you won't answer it. That's why, let's have a match.BRING IT ON !

Maybe because she feels a bit refreshed after vomitting her feelings, Satsuki then took a deep breath.

In reality, it's an inadequate reason.

But, Rio quickly guessed the motive behind Satsuki wanting to have a match against him.

"I see"

Rio's nodding while a thin smile is forming on his lips.

"I tried to think about it in my own way but, You're saying what I want to say without giving me the chance. It made me even more furious. That's why I want to feel refreshed after moving my body. That's good enough reason to have a match right? "

"That's enough. But, Is it really alright ? Doing something like this on your own convenience"

Satsuki is the hero.

Though it doesn't mean that they're assigned by rank, it's not strange if the heroes authority are on par with the king.

Seeing above the situation, the match has to be stopped even if it's just a wound.

Nevertheless, some degree of wound can be healed with healing magic.

"I don't mind. I don't think that they'll try to restrict every one of my actions as long as I'm inside the royal castle"

Satsuki is readily saying those words.

Though Rio's a little surprised by it, it shouldn't be a problem as long as Satsuki herself, a hero, allowed it. The people in their vicinity aren't showing any sign of stopping them.

On the contrary, a crowd of them is already in the vicinity because they heard

about the match.

Satsuki, the legendary existence which was recorded in the history of the God-Demon war which happened more than a thousand years ago, against Rio , [The Black Knight]whose popularity is skyrocketing— — It was impossible for the crowds to not gather in hearing such a match.

Some non-officer nobles were even included amongst the crowd.

"Ah, you're using a spear ? I heard from Miharu-chan that you taught pole-arts to them"

"Yeah, more or less"

"In that case, there's no problem right. Let me to say this, don't go easy on me just because I'm a woman, I mean I'm a hero too, Throwing the match isn't accepted"

Satsuki sternly warned him.

"Yeah, I know that"

Rio nodded while smiling wryly.

"Then, the referee is....."

Saying so, Satsuki's surveying the surrounding and her eyes landed upon one knight.

"Uhm, you must be Kyle-san right. May I ask you to act as the referee ? "

Kyle was the one who was nominated by Satsuki as the referee.

With the raid of the assassin during the evening party, he had become an acquaintance of Rio.

"Yes, with pleasure ! Are you okay with using the rule used during the practice matches of fellow knights ? "

Kyle is asking for their consent in high spirit.

"I don't mind but. Haruto-kun, can you let me explain the rules ? "

"Please then"

"Well then, I will give you the explanation about it"

Kyle is volunteering to do the job when Rio asked him.

"No time restriction. The best of one match. As for how to bring the final situation to stop the match, it's when the victor side landed a clear blow on their opponent except the face. Please do notice that you're not a victor just by disarming your opponent. Those are the basic rules"

"Acknowledged"

Rio nodded as he carved Kyle's explanation into his head.

"In addition, the usage of magic tools and magic are approved as long as it's within the category of physical reinforcement....."

"Ah, is that okay with you"

Satsuki's asking while confirming Rio's reaction.

"I don't mind. But, since I can't use physical reinforcement magic, I'll be grateful if you lend me a magic tool for it"

Since he wants to avoid using spirit arts in front of so many people, Rio decided to ask for them to lend a magic tool that can reinforce his physical ability.

Though there's [Hyper Physical Ability] magic for physical reinforcement, it doesn't mean that anyone can use this magic as long as they are a knight.

Though one needs to carve the system contract into their own body to use magic, there's still the degree of difficulty and aptitude of the individual.

In short, the system contract will fail if one has poor control of magical power and aptitude.

Thus, a magic tool with that kind of magic sealed inside of it is developed for those kinds of people.

But, while the output can be adjusted by the user, the demerit is that one can't adjust the output save for the time frame when they're invoking the magic with magic tools.

"Then, please use this one"

Maybe because he already foresaw this situation beforehand, Kyle gave a ring

to Rio.

"Thank you very much. [Hyper Physical Ability]"

Rio's telling his gratitude and then fixing the ring on his finger.

After chanting the aria, the system contract is arising from the ring and wrapped Rio body.

"You're done with your preparation right. I want to start the match right away but, let me to say one thing"

"Yes, may I know what it is ? "

"It seems the physical reinforcement of the so called divine raiment is even better than a mere magic tool. It seems that it'll strengthen my body according to my own will. I more or less can suppress it consciously but, it's rather difficult to control when I'm at the heat of the moment"

"No problem. Because there's nothing like perfectly equal ground in real combat"

"..... He~, As expected, the words of someone with real combat experience truly is different"

Satsuki's eye opened wide in admiration in hearing Rio easily brushing off her remark.

"That kind of experience isn't great at all. Shall we start then, Kyle-san"

After shaking his head in denial while showing a gloomy smile on his face, Rio urged to start the match.

"Yes. I'll start the match has Satsuki-sama also finished her preparation"

"No problem"

After Satsuki is giving her consent, Kyle opened his mouth.

"Well then, both fighters, please take some distance between each other and set your weapon"

Following Kyle's direction, Rio and Satsuki is taking about 10 metres distance between each other.

Both of them set their short spear in middle stance with their left feet one step ahead of the right feet. [TL : LANCER!!???][ED: If both are Lancers which one would die?]

It was a stance that makes one easier to both offense and defense and easier range of mobility to all direction.

"Well then——"

Kyle is raising one of his hands high to the sky.

Few seconds later,

"START ! "

Kyle swung his hand down as he signaled the start of the match with a loud voice.

"HIYAAAAH !

Satsuki's kicking the ground along with the signal to start the match and created an explosive acceleration to get closer to Rio.

And then a rain of thrusts fast approached Rio as she entered the spear range.

But, Rio calmly entwined their spear and by doing so parrying her thrust.

The resounding voice is arising from one place along with the surprise on Satsuki's face.

"As expected, and here I'm planning to win in one strike"

Satsuki said so after retreating with a back step.

"It'll end the match right away you know. Even so, you didn't have any intention to land a hit right ? "

Rio's replying at her with a calm voice.

"Eh, it's because it'll be dangerous if you really got hit by my attack right. Since I don't even know how far I can go, I thought that I can't be so careless but..... It seems my worries aren't necessary right"

Satsuki's chuckling at him.

"Yeah, come at me so that you won't regret it"

Rio's telling her that with a light smile on his face.

"Is that so ? Then, Here, I, GO ! "

Though the two of them were chatting freely while keeping the distance of where the tip of their spear is about to meet, Satsuki flipped Rio's spear and moved one step in front of him.

The battle resumes.

The two of them exchanged free blows with their spear with their reinforced physical ability.

(Though she is raising her physical ability, her movement isn't sloppy. Such skillful spear handling)

So, Rio is admiring Satsuki's skill in using her spear.

Satsuki has said before that she was training in the lesson to use naginata.

She won't be able to exhibit such perfect coordination in her movement even if she was strengthening her physical ability with magic or spirit arts unless she mastered the basics.

For that reason there's "testing the water" phase in a battle between the users of reinforcement magic, though there's a situation where mastering the basics is not always how to move one's feet, that is basically the common of all basics.

Maybe it's thanks to the glaive form that is resembling a naginata that she can exhibit such prowess.

At times she's mowing down with her spear, another time thrusting it, parrying by using it, or moving it around.

Even the spectators was watching attentively to the fiery exchange between the two of them, moreover the two of them are moving at high speed.

"Not bad ! "

Satsuki said so with her ever increasing voice.

"Thank you very much. You're quite skilled too"

Rio is replying without even losing his momentum.

Satsuki is smiling at him and then,

"It seems you have yet to go all out haven't you ! "

She replied his inquiry with consecutive thrusts.

The rush of surging waves in the form of five thrusts in one breath is coming toward Rio.

But, Rio parried all of those thrusts while calmly retreating. When he warded every thrust down to the last strike, he's thrusting his spear till the butt end of the spear right before reaching his left hand.

"To ! "

Though Satsuki's balance is slightly crumbling to avoid the spear, she dodged by jumping.

Rio's spear passed the empty air but. Just when she think that he stopped moving and turning around to face him, he had already closed the distance between them.

"KYA ! "

She set her spear right away and barely parried Rio sweep that came from below.

But, her body was blown lightly due to the force of his strike and she landed on the ground with the remaining force.

Thus she was performing a back step to kill the momentum and to open the gap between them.

But, once again Rio is closing the distance between them and then sending consecutive thrusts toward Satsuki.

"KUH"

Satsuki is looking into Rio's eye who was wielding his spear with both hands and coming to attack her. And then, one way or another she managed to regain her footing while warding countless thrusts that was coming after her.

Thereupon, Rio is pretending to pull his spear and then swept his spear with that feint.

Satsuki easily avoided the sweep that was coming from the side by lowering her stance. And then launching a counter thrust from that stance.

Rio is moving his body with flexible footwork and avoiding that thrust with paper thin margin.

"OOH ! "

Passionate gazes can be seen in the eyes of the spectators who are watching those two's fierce exchange without even daring to blink their own eyes.

"What splendid spear handling"

"It's not just Satsuki-sama, lord Haruto is also equally amazing in that regard. Isn't this a battle of equals"

"No, it seems Satsuki-sama is being overwhelmed"

Thus, the spectators in the surroundings is giving their own review.

"It seems our match is turning into some kind of exhibition isn't it ! "

Saying so, Satsuki is swinging her spear from a upper stance.

But, Rio skillfully received Satsuki's spear with a upper stance and then directed it's force to the side.

The remaining force of Satsuki's spear is colliding with the ground.

"Do you still have the composure to chat idly ? "

"Oops, just let me to do it ! "

Satsuki is hurriedly swinging her spear above in her attempt to land a hit on Rio's body.

But, Rio jumped lightly to the back to avoid Satsuki's spear and then doing a backflip which is closer to acrobatic movement.

Virtually within the moment before he landed on the ground, his spear is thrust toward Satsuki's abdomen which is practically defenseless. It was a splendid strike that was incorporating between body movement and spear movement.

"KYA ! "

Satsuki leaped back as her instinct sensed the impending crisis that is coming at her.

In that moment, Rio's spear grazed the portion of the armor on Satsuki's body.

When Satsuki is landing on the ground again after opening the distance between them,

"What is this, having composure you say"

After taking a short breath, she said so with a slightly joking tone.

"I have no such things you know"

Rio is shaking his head in denial while showing a wry smile as he set his stance again.

"No, I don't mean in a way that you're going easy on me but, I can feel that you can do more than that"

Satsuki glared at Rio.

"I mean, aren't you holding back yourself?"

"That is true but, I can feel a big gap in our experience and basic ability. To be honest, I don't think that I can win against you in a normal situation if our physical reinforcement is at the same level"

"I'm surprised. So Satsuki-san is also the kind of person who gave up victory from the very beginning ? "

Saying so, Rio was gazing at Satsuki while showing a bold smile.

"I-It's just a prediction, EVERYTHING THAT I SAY IS JUST MY PREDICTION ! DON'T MISUNDERSTAND IT SINCE I'M GONNA SEND YOU FLYING ! "

Satsuki is setting her stance with zealous passion.

"Well then, let's continue the match"

Saying so, Rio was stepping forward.

Satsuki is tightly grasping the spear in her hand.. Her every pore was focused on Rio so that she can respond with any kind of strike.

"TOO NAIVE ! "

Shouting like that, Satsuki is thrusting her spear to the front after entering the gap between her and Rio.

It was a superb strike that will land a clean hit on Rio's body the moment her thrust comes to an end.

But, Rio is moving his spear like his own limbs to change the trajectory of her thrust.

But, Satsuki's strike also won't be faltered with only that much.

She is mixing a combo of mowing down and thrust within that short interval, and managed to gain an upper hand against Rio within a few seconds.

Once, Satsuki is making a somewhat large swing with her spear.

Rio is avoiding that sweep by lowering his posture.

But, Satsuki who may be expecting this move beforehand is calmly changing the trajectory of her spear to sweep it again toward Rio who just lowered his posture.

But, Rio lightly kicking the ground and hopping on the tip of Satsuki spear and just like that using his own weight to pushing the tip of the spear to the ground.

Their surroundings is letting out an "OOh" voice in seeing such superhuman feat.

The next moment, Rio is thrusting his spear toward the left side of Satsuki neck.

No matter how one looked at it, the victor has decided.

Satsuki is only showing a befuddled expression for a moment and then,

"..... I lost"

She admitted her own defeat.

"Winner, Black knight, lord Haruto ! "

Kyle is announcing Rio as the winner.

Thereupon, the spectators who fell into silence started to raise cheers for

him.

"Thank you very much"

Rio is doing an end of match greeting while lightly bowing at her.

"Thank you very much. Ha~h, I couldn't win after all"

Satsuki said so with a strangely refreshing voice.

"No, you are terrific you know. I knew that you'll become even better as time passes"

"Yeah, I noticed that somehow I became stronger with this match. I'm more refreshed now after moving my body"

Satsuki is stretching her body lightly as she said so.

"I'm glad then. And my deepest apologies. Because of me....."

Rio told her that with a slightly hazy face.

"Well, I definitely was gloomy but, it's not a reason for you to apologize to me. We can just get along in this way right"

Satsuki is shaking her head in denial while smiling at him.

"Have you calmly considered about those matter ? "

"Aa, Un. I did so but before that. Will you come for dinner in my room tonight ? Since I have something to say at that time"

"Yeah, I don't mind"

"Really ? Well, it's decided then"

Satsuki was smiling at Rio and agreed to his invitation.

"Yes. Then, it's okay right. Can you come with less articles on your dress ? Around half of the usual.. I'll be grateful if you come with an empty stomach"

Rio said so after faltering before touching his lips.

"EH? Yup. It's okay..... But for what reason ? "

"Well then, please look forward for the dinner"

Rio showed a happy smile in seeing Satsuki's puzzled face.



After the match with Satsuki, Rio went toward Duke Kretia's mansion by foot.

Since he already made an appointment with Liselotte beforehand, the procedure is carried out smoothly.

After following along the guide till the parlor, there wasn't just Liselotte alone, her parent, Julianne and Cedric is also with her.

After sitting on the sofa facing against the three of them, their meeting begin.

"I have decided to leave the royal capital tomorrow. Though it was just for a short while, I'm truly indebted toward everyone in duke Kretia family. Thank you very much"

So, Rio told them his gratitude while also bidding a farewell.

"It's nothing, though I didn't do anything important, I still enjoyed myself for a while you know. If it's fine with you..... How about I send you back till my territory to see you off with my magic ship"

"My deepest apologies. That is a wonderful offer but I already have a prior engagement"

Rio refused her invitation with a courteous manner.

"I see. Though your rank is different from the other common nobilities, you are the noble of this kingdom. Though You may do as you please as a noble, I'll be happy as long as I can meet you even after this"

Cedric told him that with a smooth tone.

"It'll be my honor. In fact, today I also came to report my family name since it's already decided"

"Hou, that's good to hear. Would you tell us about your full name then ? "

Cedric said so with great interest.

"Amakawa, It's decided that from now on I may use the name Haruto Amakawa"

"Hou, so it's Amakawa huh. I never heard such a name but, it's strangely familiar in my ears It's a good family name"

"Thank you very much. The reason why it sound strange is maybe because I'm using the language used in my parents hometown"

Rio is replying with a blatant lie.

"Ah, your parent was originally come from Yagumo right. So that's the reason, then no wonder it..... hn ? "

The clinking sound of a tea cup hitting the tea saucer is interrupting Cedric words.

And then, everyone gaze was focusing onto the one who made that sound—— Liselotte.

"What's matter, Liselotte ? How rare of you to make such a mistake"

Making clattering sounds when drinking tea is treated as a breach of manners.

Cedric was looking at Liselotte who never made such a error based on her usual perfect manner and elegance when drinking the tea with a astonished face.

"Ah, it's nothing..... My deepest apologies. For me to show this rude manner is....."

Liselotte is apologizing while showing an awkward smile.

"I don't mind abot that but, are you currently under weather ? "

Cedric is worrying about his daughter,

"It's alright. I just blanked for a moment"

"Fufufu, could it be because you feel nervous in front of Haruto-san ? "

Julianne is showing an impish smile to Liselotte who is shaking her head.

"AH, Ahahahaha, dear mother that....."

Liselotte is making a vague statement with a wry smile on her face.

"..... No way"

Rio didn't miss the small opening on her lips.

Chapter 114: Satsuki's Feelings

Rio visited Satsuki's room that night for dinner.

Between the two of them was a large and ornate table, and no other people around.

It was common sense for a waitress or maid to be in the room, but Satsuki was the type who didn't like being disturbed during her meals. The staff were already used to this.

However, though some delectable dishes were lined up atop the table, there wasn't much. At least, not enough for two people.

"I had them reduce the amount like you asked, but is this going to be enough, Haruto-kun?"

"Yeah. Or, rather, this might be too much. [Release Discharge]"

After Rio recited the brief incantation with a confident smile, freshly made dishes appeared out of thin air in pots and on plates.

"No way..."

Satsuki's jaw dropped at the sight, only for her to catch herself when the smell of the food tickled her nose.

"Don't tell me, this is—!"

"Yep. Japanese-style."

"You're... You're kidding me."

"That one's fresh-cooked rice, over there's a stew, and that's wasabi-pickled yam."

Her eyes glittered more and more with every dish he explained.

"I-C-Can I eat this? It's the real thing, right? Authentic, genuine, bona fide Japanese food?"

Satsuki was slowly creeping her upper body closer to the food as she asked.

"During the evening party, you looked like you were craving food from back in

Japan, so go ahead. Consider this my apology for earlier."

"Ah... Thank you! I love you, Haruto-kun!"

"You're exaggerating, Satsuki-san."

Blinded by Satsuki's delight, Rio tried to calm her down, wearing a dry grin.

"Wait a minute! T-That's not what I meant! I don't mean "love" like that! The dishes! Yeah, I love the food! You better not take this the wrong way or anything, okay?"

"Haha, I know, I know."

"Agh, really! You're just imagining it! Got it?"

Rio couldn't help but laugh a little more at her embarrassment, even while she was glaring at him with a face redder than a tomato. He managed to force back down the urge to keep going.

"Don't worry, I get it. Anyway, let's eat before the food gets cold."

Realizing she was digging her own grave with the way she was acting, and it was the first familiar meal she'd seen in recent months, Satsuki quickly agreed.

Rio served up some of the stew and rice, and after an "Itadakimasu" they both dug in.

"Delicious..."

The taste of the stew permeated through Satsuki's being, warming her homesick heart, and she lost herself to the food.

Soon enough, they were cleaning up the dishes, and Satsuki started the conversation again.

"Sorry, I kind of got into a daze there. Thanks a lot for the meal, Haruto-kun."

"I feel a lot better about having made them now."

"Haruto-kun, are you always carrying these kinds of dishes around?"

"Yeah, I usually make too much, and it'd be a waste getting rid of the rest."

"Guess I shouldn't be surprised. You even take your house with you. Hey..."

Satsuki paused for a second.

"Didn't you say that stuff like soy sauce, miso and rice aren't available in the Strahl region?"

"That's true."

"... Then, why do you have this?"

"Let's not worry about the details."

Rio responded with a profound-looking gaze, but she wasn't having any of it.

"I'm worrying about it. You know I can't just drop it like this, so if you have a way to get them, please tell me!"

Satsuki was the daughter of a rather high-class family. The quality of her food was something she couldn't ignore.

The cook's skill was a factor, too, but amateurs could only do so much with even the best ingredients.

So if there was a chance she could get all of that, she wanted to take it for the sake of the diet to which she was accustomed.

"Believe it or not, I have to leave the Strahl region to restock any of those ingredients. That's why you won't see it around here."

"Ugh... Just how far away is the place that produces them?"

"The Yagumo region is far east. Too far by foot. You could take less time with physical reinforcement magic, but it's a dangerous path that hardly anyone goes down. Even an airship would take a while."

"Sounds... difficult."

"In my case, I can go there since I can fly at high speed, but in Japanese terms it'd feel like a trip to Europe for any normal person."

"I see. On top of that, Haruto-kun has that dimensional storage. You'd have virtually infinite maximum capacity for transporting. There's gotta be something wrong with all that, right...?"

Satsuki pouted like a kid at all of Rio's conveniences.

"Sorry. Including the [Item Box] I have a lot of things that aren't easy to acquire. That's why I want to keep it a secret as long as possible. Showing off

will just get me in a world of trouble."

His voice was apologetic, but he sounded like he'd been through such a thing before.

"Seriously, you are just way too strange. Your utility is off the charts."

With his high mobility and overwhelming carrying capacity, people would kill for that.

She really wanted to beg him to give her the ingredients she so yearned for, but it was easy for her to imagine what sort of trouble she'd cause him.

And yet he was willing to share that kind of secret with her, even if it seemed like just a meal.

Satsuki didn't want to betray that.

"Oh well. It's regrettable that I can't enjoy this every day."

"My apologies. Would you have preferred to not eat them?"

"No! Not at all, I definitely don't mean it that way! I just felt like I was wasting away here, living without tasting such amazing food again. But... maybe you could bring some in secret once in a while? And your house has an ofuro too, right?"

Satsuki took a peek at Rio's face with upturned eyes. Though he looked troubled for a moment, he fixed it in no time with a clearly fake smile.

"... You're right. If the chance comes up, then."

Then, as if she knew what was going on, she started shouting.

"NO!"

"Satsuki-san?"

"I refuse to say goodbye like this. We'll meet again, Haruto-kun, right? You promised, didn't you?"

She asked him sorrowfully, but Rio only responded with silence, so she stood, kicking back her chair and slamming her hands on the table.

"What is wrong with you?! Deciding all of that on your own, without saying

anything or considering how I'd feel about it! Why can't we meet anymore? Is this supposed to be a farewell dinner?

I hate this! This has nothing to do with the others, I still want to be your friend after this!"

"Friend?"

Rio's eyes widened slightly at the suggestion.

"That's right! I know we only just met, but I consider you a friend. And I thought maybe Haruto-kun felt the same. Or was I wrong?"

Shaking his head, Rio gave her a light but earnest smile.

"... Not at all. Thank you, Satsuki-san."

He felt guilty about it, but he was glad Satsuki thought of him that way.

"If that's the case, then stop acting so distant from now on! The "keep some distance between us" thing is just a show for the public, right? So is this supposed to be because of the matter with Miharu-chan?"

"..."

Might have hit the bullseye.

Rio was at a loss for words, causing Satsuki to puff her cheeks out.

"You're serious, aren't you? I won't forgive that kind of selfish decision-making. I am not letting you say, "Let's not see each other again.""

Her resolution took him by surprise.

He could have cut off his remaining connections with Miharu, Aki and Masato if he cut off his connection with Satsuki here, but the girl herself was making that impossible.

Rio questioned whether he had the privilege of being called her friend, but the answer was already staring him down.

Sorting through the conflicting feelings in his heart, he simply nodded.

"... Understood."



In the middle of their dinner, King Francois spoke in his office with his children, Michael and Charlotte.

He wanted a report from their activities during the party.

"Father, is it really okay to let Haruto does as he pleases?"

Michael timidly spoke up after, but Francois cut him off without hesitation.

"There's no problem with it. The man himself has no intention of serving the kingdom. It may be better this way."

"This might sound arrogant, but now we have nothing to tie Satsuki to Galwark after we cede her friends to Saint Stella kingdom, don't we?"

"I've already accounted for insurance. Our new honorary knight is quite enough. Fortunately for us, that man and Satsuki-dono seem to have a very favorable relationship to me. Charlotte?"

"Yes, dear father. Satsuki-sama has been so cheerful the last few days. It's as though she's an entirely different person."

Charlotte gave her consent with a knowing smile.

"If that's so, then..."

Michael was uneasy about their relationship, but he kept it down. This wasn't the time or place to voice his curiosities.

That said, Charlotte was ordered by Francois to try to get close to them. It should have been fine to ask about it, at least indirectly.

"The real goal of the party was just as I said before."

Suddenly, Francois derailed his train of thought.

"To look for someone who will attract Satsuki... right?"

"Indeed."

"But then wouldn't Satsuki's friends have the highest value?"

"Hmhm, when concluding the discussion of an alliance with Saint Stella kingdom, we included some necessary particulars in the contract regarding the treatment of Satsuki-dono's friends."

Francois remained forthright with the information.

"That's just how friendships are; it's a matter of chance, just like a relationship between a man and woman. One cannot reliably say that someone will be more amiable with decades-old friends than someone they'd met only a few days ago. Don't you also believe Satsuki-dono has gotten quite intimate with Haruto?"

He talked to his son with a pleasant tone.

"You should prioritize national interests."

"... I know."

"Then, do you understand? The heroes act as the apostles of the six wise gods. If mistreated, they can become a poison just as easily as they can a panacea."

"Of course. That's why the will of the hero should be respected to the best of our ability."

"That's right."

The Strahl region believed in the six wise gods. Civilization in the region wouldn't have developed to its current state if not for them bestowing upon the people a variety of magical technology.

As a result, most rulers in the region treat the gods' items as national treasures related to their kingdom, and use it—that is, borrowing the gods' divine will—to justify their kingdom's authority.

There's no independent priest or organization, either, nor a holy head to represent the will of the gods. Instead, each kingdom's ruler is the head of faith in their kingdom. Priests belong to the kingdom as well.

It's not much different in Galwark.

In short, Francois is not only head of state, but also the religious leader in the country.

On the other hand, while Satsuki has no noble authority, she is the personification of one of the gods' divine will. So even though she won't rule the kingdom any time soon, as a hero she holds significant political control

through religion.

As long as a hero is allied to a kingdom, they are directly connected to its rise in power.

Naturally, that means they want to keep Satsuki as close to Galwark as possible, but that also means they need to be careful with the method.

It's contrary to the hero's will and the kingdom's own policy, and could turn out very, very badly for the kingdom, so keeping her friends hostage is something they considered an absolute last resort.

It might be worth calling this a test for Francois as king. He had to see how much he could align Satsuki with Galwark's objectives without relying on something so heavy-handed.

Francois was also acutely aware that Satsuki was on alert toward the kingdom until this past week. The evening party was one of his measures to winning her over, and it seemed to work.

Thanks to the event, Satsuki brightened up. A massive change from her melancholy before meeting Rio and his protectees.

"As your father I wish to help you, seeing as how you fell in love with Satsuki-dono. However, I must ask that you refrain from stirring the pot with your personal feelings."

"You... You know about that, Father?"

Michael's eyes bulged a little.

"I'm the one who told you to get close to Satsuki-dono and gain her trust, right? Did you think I wouldn't see through you? Rather than making her fall in love with you, I was surprised to find the opposite had happened."

"... My apologies."

"No need for that. You understood your position well enough. But you made Charlotte jealous since you wouldn't accompany her anymore."

He ended with a hearty laugh as Michael looked to his sister.

"Is that true?"

"So you weren't even aware of it. Hmph."

Sulking, Charlotte turned away.

"Sorry, Charlotte."

"I don't really mind that much. After all, Haruto-sama is much more gentle than Onii-sama."

"S-So even you think he's that good?"

Charlotte only giggled gleefully as her brother lost his composure.

"Maybe now you understand some of my feelings, having to compete for Onii-sama's affections with a girl who doesn't want them."

"... Uhm, yes, I understand. Please don't make me more embarrassed of myself than I already am."

Unable to take the brocon/siscon comedy routine any longer, Francois called out to them.

"Let's stop this here; I still have work to do. If you want to continue, you can leave it for later."

Chapter 115: And Now the Departure

The next morning, Satsuki went to Rio's room.

"Say Haruto-kun, will you eat all of these bread and sausage ? "

Satsuki is asking timidly while looking at the dishes that lining up on the table.

A fresh from the oven round shaped bread, beef and vegetable soup, sausages, scrambled eggs and fresh fruits.

The breakfast menu became relatively simple at Satsuki's request but, it was a luxurious breakfast when comparing to the commoner.

The ingredients they're using for it is also first class.

"If you want some, I'll happily share it you know"

Rio is showing his consent.

Thereupon, Satsuki is showing a bright and clear smile in the next moment.

"Thank you. Since it's a waste of food if you are not finishing it. Should I say that the food of the castle is too oily, or too dark with their seasoning right"

Thus, Satsuki quickly presented a plate to Rio while grumbling about the meal in the castle.

"Even at our best, a woman will only eat a little for their breakfast"

While saying so, she is receiving several bread and sausages from Rio.

"I'm considered as a heavy eater even amongst my generation you know. Since many girls skip their breakfast and only eat yoghurt and fruits as their breakfast"

"And then, they're holding out just like that till lunch time right"

"As for that, well I wonder if I'm actually not girl-like ? "

"I see"

Rio was admiring her "As long as there's faith, there'll be a way out" reply while smiling wryly.

"Well, shall we eat our breakfast then ? "

Satsuki is telling him that after he is done with sharing his bread and sausages while chatting about those topic.

"Yeah, well then——"

"Itadakimasu"

The two of them are exchanging gaze and then said those words at the same time.

After matching their hands for a while, they're taking the cutlery.

"I thought about this since last night, your table manners sure are pretty aren't they, Haruto-kun"

Satsuki said so in admiration.

"No, maybe it's because I feel nervous since your table manner is elegant. That's why I'm caring about my table manners more than usual"

"Is that so ? "

"Yes. Satsuki-san of last night was completely focused on your meal but, it seems you've calmed down this morning. Since you have the composure for light conversation too"

Rio is saying so while showing an impish smile at her.

In front of her japanese food that she tasted after a long time, Satsuki of last night was completely enthralled by the food that already became her dream. Even when she wasn't eating in the public place, her well bred still appeared.'

"S-Shut up. Yesterday was japanese food, so it was a speacial case ! "

Satsuki is sticking her tongue a bit in front to him. She is nimbly moving the cutlery in her hands as if to hide her own embarrassed feeling and then scooped the soup with her spoon.

"And then, where are you going to go after leaving the castle today ? "

A while later, Satsuki asked that question to change the topic.

"I'm heading to the west. Since I've a promise with my acquaintance"

Rio just obediently riding on the topic.

"I see. You shouldn't do anything dangerous you know"

"Yeah, I'll try to do that as much as I can"

After Rio is consenting to her request, Satsuki's movement stopped,

(As much as possible huh. Maybe it's already in his character even without me asking that. Well, I can only pray in order for him to not involved in strange events)

She glared at Rio.

Rio who noticed Satsuki's gaze is tilting his head with a puzzled expression.

Satsuki is heaving a long sigh and then,

"Well then Haruto-kun, before you start your journey, may I say something to you ? It's the continuation of last night. In regard to Miharu-chan's matter, I think you should convey what you feel to them"

She is staring into his eyes while asking for his answer

"Yes, no problem"

Rio is nodding while staring back at her eyes.

Thereupon, Satsuki spoke with a timid tone.

"I have no intention to fix upon the mistake that you made. But, I want you to do it for the last time. Haruto-kun, do you agree with the current situation ? "

"Yes"

Rio is replying without hesitation.

"Really ? "

Satsuki is chewing her lips and then asked for the second time.

"Yes"

Satsuki is looking at Rio who is nodding in no time.

But, she can't detect the fluctuation of his heart from his action or eyes.

"I see....."

And then, Satsuki who is showing a giving up face is reacting as if she is still not convinced by him.

"It seems Satsuki-san still won't believe me"

Rio said those words while smiling lightly at her.

"I mean....."

Satsuki is at loss for words.

"Maybe I have a lover..... No, lover was only when you have someone who you love. Miharu-san is going out with Takahisa-san right ? "

"That is true, but still....."

"In that case, my love will only become an illicit love. Though I wish for her to become my lover, it's only natural that I can't do that since she is already going out with someone else"

"....."

Satsuki was at a loss for words—— Since she is also thinking the same thing as Rio. Since even for Satsuki, there's no way she can answer someone's feeling for her when she already has a lover. If she accepted that confession, it'll become an affair—— In short, two timing.

If it's coming from Satsuki's japanese sense of value, she would consider that there'll be no two timing in a normal situation.

"I have prepared myself in hearing the fact that Miharu-san is Takahisa-san's lover. But still, I wanted to settle this regret of mine. That was the reason for my confession. That is the reason why I can go that far. That's why I won't intrude further just for my self-satisfaction"

Satsuki just bit her lips in vexation when Rio is frankly telling her that.

And then, she opened her lips.

"..... I think you are correct. Your rational train of thought that is considering the other party's feeling was that of an adult. But——"

Satsuki is gaining more confidence the more she talks.

"As for me, I really want you to tell her about that properly and seeing it till

the end. Even if Miharu-chan can't answer your feeling toward her. Because, you and Miharu-chan are my important friends. I really don't want to see both of you putting something in your heart which will prevent you from talking properly to each other"

"That's....."

Now it was Rio who is at a loss for words.

Satsuki is conveying her honest thoughts about this matter to Rio.

"Doing something like moving around without considering anything is childish but, too much consideration without taking any action is what I call as LOSER[Hetare]"

Rio's slightly bewildered in hearing such straight forward words from Satsuki.

"..... That's harsh isn't it"

So, Rio muttered those words to mock himself.

"So what, I'm the student council president after all. Aren't I giving advice to my junior who lost his way "

Satsuki is saying so with a puffed smile.

"But, please don't misunderstand. I'm telling you this doesn't mean that I'm forcing you to take on my opinion. In order to let Haruto-kun to show me his own thoughts, I have to show my own thoughts to him"

While their gaze mingled together, Rio was listening to Satsuki with a serious look on his face.

"I'll be cheering for you. I'll be supporting in what you consider as the best choice. I really don't want you to have such cruel consideration on yourself but, no matter what happens, this is your decision"

"Satsuki-san....."

And then, silence descended upon them for a few seconds.

Though they were staring at each other for a few seconds, maybe because she felt embarrassed, Satsuki turned her blushing face away with a awkward expression on her face.

"Well, that is all of it. Please take my advice as one of your options"

"Yes. Thank you very much"

After replying so, Satsuki is clearing her throat and,

"And then, I'll give my promise now that I won't cause a disturbance when you meet with Miharu-chan's from now on. But, I want to listen properly to the story of Miharu-chan. That's why I want you to permit me to do that much"

Said so while pouting lightly.

There's something that Satsuki found hard to understand in regard to the recent behaviour of Miharu.

The discord between Haruto and Aki aside, even if she received a confession from Haruto while still going out with Takahisa, she doesn't think that Miharu will do such a cold-hearted action by disappearing right in front of Rio without saying anything.

In fact, Miharu might have wanted to have a conversation with Rio—— No, with Haruto who is her childhood friend.

Even so, there might be a reason that she can't go against which is forcing her to go toward Saint Stellar kingdom.

(It seems there's a reason for that..... The reason why she's in such a hurry to go back)

Though Rio might be aware of that too, she feels that maybe Rio won't take such a assertive move in the present.

She knows from his words that Rio is drawing a line somewhere in himself, and will stay before that line.

The reason that he explained before is a plausible argument—— No, she can't even find any error behind his argument.

But, she cannot help but to think that his real intention is basically somewhere else. Maybe because Rio has no confidence in his own self, or maybe because deep down he can't trust a stranger, there's the side that feels something. Though they just met, Satsuki was looking at Rio's distorted nature.

And then, she even thought—— The majority of the reason may be because Rio is basically suppressing most of his own ego.

Satsuki isn't aware of everything of what has happened in Rio's past.

Even so, it has nothing to do with her.

(I just need to act according to what I think is right)

Satsuki was driven by a sense of duty called "Unless I make my move, nothing will change to Miharuru or Rio".

As for what is motivating Satsuki to do that, even Satsuki herself can't understand it. But, she knows of one fact that at least she won't accept the current situation.

"So, what is your answer ? "

Satsuki is pressing Rio who is showing a hesitating expression to answer her request.

".....Yes. Understood"

A while later, Rio is nodding as if resigned to her request.

"Good"

Satsuki is smiling with a satisfied expression and then started to move her cutlery again.

Rio also smiled wryly at her, the breakfast time passing by just like that.

Thus, after finishing the breakfast and drinking the after meal tea,

"May I take my leave soon ? Since I must leave the capital in the morning"

Rio told her that it's the time for his departure without beating around the bush.

"Of course. Thank you for accompanying me during these few days. I really enjoyed the last few days"

"Me too. Let's meet again in someday. For sure"

So, Rio's telling his parting words to Satsuki with a gentle smile on his face.

Satsuki is showing a befuddled expression for a moment and,

"..... Yes. Let's meet again later ! "

She replied immediately with a bashful expression.



Galtwark, the royal capital of Galwark kingdom have several city gates and rampart from each block of the city with a lake view on it's east side.

First is the eastern most block where high ranked royalties and nobilities live near the lake— Is an extremely guarded area where no one can come in or out unless they have the permit.

After that is the central block where the citizens and lower ranked nobles live in— It's an area where one needs to pay a certain amount of tax at the gate for going in and out.

Miharu and Celia was staying in the inn within this block.

Moreover, though there's an area where it becomes the west block, that is the place for the people who can't live inside the city gate, it has no rampart, though you can freely go in and out, the public order isn't that good.

After saying his parting, Rio left the royal castle and went toward a certain inn within the east block.

After reporting that he has leave to catle to Aisia who is staying in the inn via telepathic communication, he summoned her to come with Celia toward the west block. And then, just before leaving the central block, he is waiting for Celia and Aisia right outside the exit of the gate. Thereupon, the two of them arrived before 30 minutes passed since he is waiting for them.

Haruto.

Rio is looking at his surrounding as Aisia's telepathic communication reverberated in his mind. And then, he instantly found the person he was looking for.

Aisia and Celia, both of them wearing black and white robes with a hood respectively, they are hiding their extremely standing out appearance to avoid the public gaze.

"Somehow it feels like it's been a long time since I've seen that appearance

right"

After arriving at the distance where they can speak to each other, Celia said those words with a somewhat delighted tone while looking at Rio bundled in traveling attire.

"Is that so ? "

Rio's turning his neck to confirm his own appearance.

The current Rio is wearing a long coat and a thin but extremely durable leather armor made from the leather of a powerful lesser dragon called black dragon, the custom made mithril sword given to him by the craftsmans of Seirei no Tami strapped on his waist, and he wore cloth armor made of mithril fibre under his armor.

Certainly it's been a while since he appeared in front of Celia using this attire.

When Rio's thinking in that way.

"So, what about Miharu's ? "

Celia timidly asked that question while looking at the surroundings.

"Miharu's went to the Saint Stellar kingdom"

Rio is conveying the fact with a slightly timid expression.

Thereupon, Celia's eyes opened wide in surprise,

"I see. So they left already....."

She heaved a sigh with a sad face.

"I'm sorry. The people of Saint Stellar kingdom suddenly decided to leave due to an urgent matter, thus there's not enough time for them to bid their farewell"

"There's no need for you to apologize for that you know. I somehow felt that things will turn this way ever since Miharu's decided to come to the royal castle"

"Is that true ? "

Rio's surprised in seeing Celia's reaction.

"Well, the situation that I'm worrying about did happen right. Moreover, the one who take them is Aki and Masato's family right ? "

"Yes"

"In that case, it can't be helped. Family huh——"

Rio was looking at Celia who is talking in a strangely familiar tone with such situation with a surprised face. Celia then asking to him with lovely gesture.

"What's the matter ? Is there something on my face ? "

"It's nothing, I was just thinking that you unexpectedly have such far sight"

Rio is shaking his head in denial and said those words while smiling wryly at her.

Celia's looking at the sky while wearing a pondering expression and,

"Uhm, well, I'm with Rio again after all. I don't know how to express this but, it's because I think that we can't meet again. I feel lonely and surprised but, we somehow met again"

She's spinning her words as if groping the feeling in her heart.

"I see"

In addition to that she might think about another matter—— And Rio admired that part of her.

"Yup, moreover——"

Celia is wearing a troubled look on her face as if having a hard time to say the sentence.

"Moreover ? "

Rio is urging her to continue. Thereupon, Aisia suddenly approached him at with a brisk gait and then tightly held his hand. Celia is startled in seeing that.

"U~hm, Aisia ? "

Aisia does that to him occasionally.

Rio felt that she can see through everything when she is staring into his eyes. But, he isn't feeling disgusted or strange due to that.

And then, when Rio and Aisia is staring at each other in that way from point blank distance, before he was aware of it, Celia already standing by his side and pulling his sleeve.

"Wait a minute, what in the world just happened for the two of you to make the world of the two of you ? Aren't you just leaving me aside here"

Saying so, Celia was staring at Rio's face.

"No, even if you call that as the world of the two of us it is a bit....."

"Let's go. Haruto"

Aisia is pulling Rio's faltered hand and just like that starting to walk at a brisk pace.

"..... W-Wait for me ! Geez ! "

Though Celia was looking at the back of those two, she eventually chased toward their back in a hurry.

"By the way Aisia, till when will you hold Rio's hand ? "

Celia is asking that question while looking at Rio's hand which was still grasped by Aisia with the corner of her eyes.

"I can't do this ? "

"N-No, it's not like I mean that you can't do that but....."

When she asked back from the front, Celia is at a loss for words.

"Does Celia want to hold Haruto's hand too ? "

Aisia asked that question as she tilted her head with a confused face.

"WAAA-T-THAT'S NOT ! THAT'S NOT WHAT I MEAN ! WHEN YOU GUYS HOLD EACH OTHER'S HAND LIKE THAT, DON'T JUST LEAVE ME ALONE"

Celia is denying Aisia with a flushed red face.

"In that case, it'll be okay as long as Celia is also holding Haruto's hand"

(In that case, there's another choice of holding Aisia's hand right?)

Thought Rio was thinking about such a problem, he can't just nonchalantly let go of Aisia's hand since her hand is tightly grasped on his hand.

"That's....."

Celia is mumbling with a low voice while looking at Rio's hand which is unoccupied by Aisia.

"No, won't that will cause various problems?. Aishia"

Rio is cutting into their conversation since he doesn't want to think about the figure of them walking side-by-side with their hands joining together.

"Then, Celia doesn't want to ? "

"No that is just..... Maybe you just need to let go of my hand"

So, Rio is trying to persuade her somehow.

"I can't hold your hand ? "

"U~h....."

Staring at Aisia who has such pure and innocent eyes, Rio almost unintentionally said "Of course you can".

Thereupon, Celia is showing a surprised face.

"F-Fine then ! I'll hold Haruto's hand too"

Saying so, she took Rio's unoccupied hand.

"S-Sensei"

"I-It's okay right.

Don't tell me that you're okay doing that with Aisia but not with me ? "

Celia is saying those words in rapid succession with a flushing red face.

"It's..... Okay"

Rio just couldn't bring himself to say "no" when he is looking at the slightly formed tears in the corner of Celia's eyes as if she trying to do her best to suppress her embarrassment.

Celia is heaving a relieved breath while Rio heaved a sigh by her side.

"S-Shall we go then"

After saying those words with a lively voice, Celia is pulling Rio's hand.

Aisia also pulling his other hand, and just like that the three of them walking side by side while holding onto Rio's hand till they leave the city and then fly in the air.

Chapter 116: Interlude

Afternoon of the day Rio left Galwark Kingdom.

The hero who belonged to Bertram Kingdom's anti-government organization [Restoration]—Sakata Hiroaki—was visiting the mansion of Duke Kretia alongside Flora for lunch.

On Hiroaki's plate was a finely-marbled well done steak, smoothly being cut through by his knife. As he took a bite, the steak melted in his mouth as if he didn't even need to chew, and the savory gravy slowly drowned his taste buds.

"The food at Liselotte's place is amazing as usual. This steak is first rate, and the seasoning brings out the meat's natural flavor."

"I'm honored to receive such praise. I was worried about whether I could satisfy the tastes of a gourmet like Hiroaki-sama."

Liselotte answered with a smile, but Hiroaki started looking a little dissatisfied.

"It's perfect. Or, I want to say that, but now I really want to eat rice to go with such delicious meat..."

"Fufu, it seems like Hiroaki-sama always wants to eat his meals with rice."

Flora interjected, giggling in her seat.

"It's the staple food of my homeland after all. Wish I could eat it again someday."

Hiroaki sounded slightly embarrassed as he spoke, while Liselotte suddenly showed a smug grin.

"Actually, I had a dish with rice prepared just for today."

"Wait, for real?"

"Yes. Aria."

She exchanged a glance with the maid by her side.

Aria bowed, then moved to the tray she carried the food out on, bringing

Hiroaki and Flora's eyes with her.

"Ohh, this is... Is this a risotto?"

"This rice is from a plant being cultivated by Rikka Firm in a certain area of the Strahl region. That area typically uses porridge instead of wheat, so I had it made with that in mind."

"Ah, so this is the kind that isn't very sticky. Yeah, this isn't best suited to be eaten straight like white rice."

"So this is rice? It's the first time I've seen an ingredient like this."

Flora looked curious about the risotto. She'd never even seen freshly-threshed oats before today.

It was a normal reaction for a princess. Although fresh wheat could be eaten as a congee, that was the food of commoners who couldn't even afford bread.

"Perhaps because the recipe isn't widespread, it's not preferred by royals or nobles. This one is the result of trial and error as well, but please enjoy it."

The two guests lifted their spoons to their mouths in answer.

"This is..."

"Delicious."

"It's wonderful."

Their mouths unwittingly went slack when they gave their impression.

"The flavor of creamy butter and cheese are spreading through my mouth. It's rich, yet not overpowering. And the pepper is a nice accent."

"As expected of you, Hiroaki-sama. Your palate is truly impeccable."

"I'm a picky eater after all."

Hiroaki spoke as if it was something to be proud of.

"This dish has my full approval. It'd become a hit if it spreads. Don't you think so, Flora?"

"Right. The pasta earlier is delicious as well, but this wouldn't lose."

Following the flow of the conversation, Flora obediently nodded along.

"Thank you very much. If you're okay with it, I'll give some of the rice to you as well. Hiroaki-sama should know quite a few recipes, no?"

"Really? Sounds interesting. I'll give it a shot."

"Thank you so much, Liselotte-sama."

"Please, there's no need for thanks. But in exchange, I'd be grateful if you could promote this dish among Restoration."

Liselotte answered them with a playful grin, and Flora quickly made a proposition.

"Yes, of course! Ah, right! It would be wonderful if Satsuki-sama could be invited to taste this food, right?"

"Certainly, since Satsuki-sama seemed to miss the taste of rice herself. I hope to invite her soon."

"That's wonderful. I wanted to talk with Satsuki-sama too..."

"Are you low on time? Then before you leave, would you like to have a little tea party? I can invite Satsuki-sama as well."

"I would love to!"

Flora brightened up, then turned to Hiroaki beside her.

"Um, are you going to join us, Hiroaki-sama?"

"Eh, count me out. Sounds like trouble to me."

"But..."

"It should be fine, right? I wouldn't have anything to say. Besides, do you think any men would come to a tea party in the first place?"

No joke; she's pretty, but I can't handle those nagging, class rep-type girls. Anyone who says they're a lot better when you treat them well is lying to your face. Plus, I finally came to another world. Too much hassle trying to get along with some damn normie I don't even know.

While Hiroaki let his thoughts run amok, Liselotte changed the topic after sensing it veer into the unpleasant.

"Come to think of it, Satsuki-sama challenged Haruto-sama to a match yesterday. Did you get a chance to see it?"

"It was splendid. They were almost too fast to follow. What did you think, Hiroaki-sama?"

"Ah, I guess you could see it that way. I can't say I enjoyed it as much; she went easy on him. Normally a hero like Satsuki can't be defeated."

Hiroaki heaved a disappointed sigh.

"What do you mean by "going easy", Hiroaki-sama?"

"Because it simply wouldn't be a fight if a hero released all their power. If I were to fight without holding anything back, there'd be no losing for me."

His proud tone shone through again, leaving Liselotte a bit shocked.

"How confident."

"It's only natural. The heroes rule over nature itself. Forget single combat, even an army couldn't stand against us."

"The heroes control nature?"

"Yeah, with our divine raiments. For example, my [Yamata no Orochi] gives me total power over the water element."

So he said with his bold smile.

"[Yamata no Orochi]?"

"Hm? Yeah, it's the name of my raiment. Back in my world, it's the name of a mythical beast known as the god of water. Divine raiments don't have a name, but giving it one makes it easier to materialize."

"To think those kinds of secrets exist in them... But, why do you know such things? Did you have that knowledge from the beginning?"

"I got a weird dream my first night in this world. I think it's because of that dream teaching me everything that I had all of this information unconsciously after I woke up. Basically, the weapon taught me how to use it."

"I see... It seems I've just heard quite the interesting story. Thank you very much, Hiroaki-sama."

Liselotte looked bemused for a moment at Hiroaki's vague explanation, but she quickly gave him her gratitude with her typical smile.



Somewhere on the highway stretching north of the Galwark royal capital—
A commoners' coach made way for a convoy of noble carriages, the latter on its way to the kingdom of Rubia.

Armed knights and soldiers surrounded them.

Inside one, decorated the gaudiest of them all, rode a girl in a white knight's uniform and a man hidden by his black robe.

The girl was renowned as the knight princess, Rubia Kingdom's second princess, Silvy.

The man shrouded in mystery was someone whose fate crossed with Rio's, Reis.

The now-seventeen Silvy was glaring at the robed man, her discontent marring her otherwise sculpture-like features.

"I cooperated with you as promised. My little sister... Return Estelle immediately."

"Mm, but the plan failed, didn't it?"

Reis only answered her demand with a vulgar grin.

"Don't fuck with me! This isn't what we agreed on!"

But all he did was shrug.

"Oh, yeah, it's regrettable. I did say that I'd return your sister as long as you worked with us, but I don't remember saying anything about that being the only condition..."

"You, quit screwing around. Don't you understand the risks we took going along with your plan? All the preparation down the drain..."

"What, that was just a little sideshow."

"Sideshow? Trying to massacre the royals of multiple kingdoms was just a

sideshow to you?!"

"It's not like I was trying to assassinate them. Don't you think it was entertaining to spice up that boring party?"

"As if!"

"Aw, that's disappointing."

After a moment to calm down, Silvy looked meekly at Reis, who only seemed more arrogant than ever.

"Hey... I can pay ransom. I can swear not to disclose your identity. So why won't you give me back my sister?"

"If ransom was what I wanted, I would have gotten it long ago. You should know by now I have no need for such things."

"Then tell me... what are you after? If you wanted a hostage, wouldn't I be a better choice? The first princess would be higher value than the second."

"Because a *hostage* is frail and weak. A strong-willed woman like yourself makes a horrible prisoner."

"Estelle is safe, right?"

"Yes, of course. She's a brave girl. And attractive to boot."

Reis' creepy smile ticked her off more than usual, and her next words chilled to the bone.

"... Filth. You try anything strange to her, I'll make you regret it for the rest of your miserable life."

"Ooh, how scary, I'm shaking in my boots. You shouldn't be so reckless; we're accomplices, after all. Shouldn't we be getting along?"

"Hmph..."

Silvy gave up trying to talk, turning her face to the coach window.

Wait for me, Estelle. I'll save you, no matter what... But, I wonder what Renji would have done in this situation...

A few days after Miharū, Aki and Masato were taken to Saint Stella Kingdom

—

Sendou Aki had a dream of when she was a child. It was nine years ago, before Haruto's and her parents divorced.

The Amakawa house was dual income. With both parents working, they didn't have much time to take care of the kids.

For the still-young Aki, rather than her parents, the work of raising her was left to Haruto and Miharu.

It was only natural for her to love the two of them as much as she did, and they made an ideal brother and sister to her.

Although their intimacy often took them to their own little world, Aki was happy just being able to see them together.

"Onii-chan, Oneechan—"

The young Aki in the dream called to them.

It felt strange.

Usually there was only a feeling of resentment whenever she thought of the boy, but at the moment there was none.

The Aki from her dream was absentmindedly watching Haruto and Miharu.

Their surroundings were covered in jet black darkness, the three of them in the sole white space.

It was a memory of them playing house; Haruto and Miharu were the parents, and Aki playing the part of their daughter.

It was the exclusive privilege of Aki's to be pampered like this.

"Onii-chan, Oneechan, let's play house!"

"Sure."

"Okay, Aki-chan."

As always, they answered with a smile.

These moments of bliss should never end, she thought.

"I want us to stay like this forever..."

"We can't. Tomorrow's not a holiday."

But Haruto turned her down with a troubled look.

"Ehh~ but I want to sleep with Onii-chan and Oneechan."

She wanted the three of them to always be together.

Aki was a bit envious of what Haruto and Miharu were to each other, they never left her out.

"You see, we can only do that when the next day's a day off."

"Can't you do something, Haruto-kun?"

His only weakness, Miharu, timidly interjected.

"Well, if Mi-chan asks, I guess so... Do you want to sleep in my room tonight, Aki?"

"Ah, is that okay?"

Like a switch being flipped, Aki brightened up in the blink of an eye.

"Yeah, but, you're always sleeping with Mom and Dad. Are you sure you won't cry in the middle of the night?"

"I-I won't cry! I'll be okay as long as it's with Onii-chan!"

"Alright, then let's sleep together tonight, Aki."

Off to the side, Miharu was muttering something under her breath.

"So... That's so unfair, Aki-chan..."

Haruto stopped, stunned, then smiled wryly.

"Did you want to sleep with Aki, too, Mi-chan?"

"Mm, that's right, but..."

"You can stay over on our next day off."

"Really?"

"Mhm."

"Ehehe~"

"Can I sleep with you then too?"

Haruto and Miharu turned back to Aki, answering together.

"Of course."

"Ehehe~ it's a promise."

"Yeah, it's a promise."

"Onii-chan, Oneechan, you'll always be with me, right?"

So she requested, beaming innocently.

"Sure thing."

"Yeah, we'll be here for you, Aki-chan."

When the two of them nodded to her, the white area around her darkened.

She couldn't see her own fingers, much less anything else.

"Onii-chan? Oneechan?"

She called anxiously.

"Aki-chan."

Then she heard Miharu respond from the darkness.

"Ah, Miharu-oneechan."

She was relieved.

—Miharu-oneechan didn't break her promise. Even after the divorce, she stayed by my side, and slept with me when I was sad.

—She's not like him. Even though he said we could sleep together. Even though he promised we'd always be together.

She couldn't suppress those feelings of hers.

She couldn't help being frustrated.

Of course, she understood the situation.

Aki knew her resentment wasn't justified.

But emotion and logic were two different things.

"Aki-chan."

Swaying, swaying.

"Aki-chan, wake up... Aki-chan..."

Pushing, pushing.

Someone was shaking her.

"Liar..."

The words slipped from her mouth.

"Huh...?"

Aki's eyes shot open.

Miharu's confusion reached her ears as light filled her vision.

They were in a room in the Saint Stella royal palace that was given to the two of them.

"Miharu-oneechan..."

Miharu looked worried for her.

"Good morning. Are you not feeling okay? Your face is a little pale."

"Morning. I'm fine. More importantly, did I say something just now?"

She had a pretty heavy dream. She was curious if she said anything strange, but Miharu just shook her head.

"Eh? No... Nothing in particular."

"Really?"

"Yeah."

"I see..."

Relieved, Aki let out a gentle breath.

"I've finished preparing breakfast, but, do you think you can eat?"

"Thank you. Miharu-oneechan, that's..."

Her eyes widened seeing Miharu having donned one of the royal maids'

uniforms.

"I can't just sit around idly. I asked Liliana-sama if there was anything I could do, so she requested I take care of you and Masato-kun. It's better for the both of you, too."

Miharu was originally supposed to stay in the castle as a guest.

She could have asked for anything and gotten it without a fuss, but Miharu stubbornly refused.

"Is that so. I guess you're right that it'd make us more comfortable..."

Aki thought back to the uproar of a few days ago.

It lasted the entire ride to Saint Stella and then some.

Miharu and Takahisa never stopped fighting even while they were being guided to the castle.

The entire thing was just one extended argument, a continuation of what happened when they first took off.

Takahisa was being obstinate, repeatedly refusing Miharu's requests to be sent back to Galwark.

Both sides had no intention of backing down, but Takahisa held all the cards, deeming it impossible for Miharu to go back alone.

In the end, Miharu's been in Saint Stella under what was effectively house arrest with the royal treatment.

Their relationship has gone south, too. Neither of them had been willing to even speak to the other.

And Aki, who cared for both of them dearly, was only able to bite her nails and watch.

"Miharu-oneechan, do you hate Onii-chan?"

"... I'm very angry with him, but I don't hate him."

She answered in a harsher voice than usual. Aki knew she was more than just angry.

In all their years together Aki had never seen Miharuru, the embodiment of kindness, get truly mad about something.

"Ah—you see, I don't think Onii-chan is opposing you going back to Galwark out of malice. Onii-chan is worried about you, Miharuru-oneechan."

"I know that, Aki. But, I'm sorry. I can't accept it that easily. My feelings aren't going to change."

Miharuru stressed a little as she spoke.

"But, he said that Haruto-san and Satsuki-san were okay with it. I think it'll be fine. It's not like we'll never see them again, and it seems like they'll come sooner or later."

Aki was frantically trying to bring Miharuru over to Takahisa's side, but all she gave her was a stiff smile.

"I'm sorry. Aki-chan, let's stop here. I'm going to call Masato-kun so the three of us can have breakfast together, okay?"

"... Okay..."

Miharuru quickly left the room, and Aki heaved a deep sigh as the door closed.

I can't let things stay this way. I wonder how it ended up like this. And I can't even do anything to help them get along again...



Noon of the same day, in the castle's training grounds.

Takahisa and Masato were dueling each other with a wooden practice sword in their hands.

Masato carried a shortsword and shield, while Takahisa had a longsword in both hands.

A minute had already passed by since they began, and though Takahisa's physical abilities seemed to give him an overwhelming advantage, Masato was deftly deflecting each swing with his shield.

"Masato-sama only learned swordsmanship after coming to this world, right? Takahisa-sama mentioned he never learned before."

One of Liliana's royal knights, Hilda, was watching wide-eyed while talking with Aki.

"It's the truth. He only started learning after we arrived here."

"Then, then one who taught him..."

"It was Haruto-san, the person who protected us."

"I see, so it was the Black Knight. It makes sense if it was under his tutelage."

Hilda looked on at Masato with admiration, much to Aki's surprise.

Masato was focusing on protecting himself the entire time, gauging Takahisa's skill.

Then suddenly, he turned on the offensive.

"Here I come, Aniki!"

He parried another swing of Takahisa's sword with his shield, and immediately stepped in close past Takahisa's defense.

"Just try it!"

Takahisa twisted his body, bringing his sword with him.

The sword drew a tight arc, but Masato brought up his shield to match it.

Shifting the point of impact, he broke Takahisa's momentum and staggered him.

"How clever!"

If he'd missed it by a second, Masato would have been blown away.

A rookie would have stiffened up when facing that kind of close-range attack, but Masato didn't hesitate to step forward into it.

Be it the training that made him feel like his life was in real danger, or his natural courageousness, he was scoring some serious points in Hilda's eyes.

"Hah!"

Masato corrected his stance as he shouted, pushing toward Takahisa with his shield in front.

He was never going to match in strength, but it was easy enough to keep the already-struggling Takahisa off balance.

"Kh!"

"Your aim is weak, Aniki!"

Takahisa stepped back, swinging his sword once to gain some distance, but Masato turned on the balls of his feet, knocking the elder's sword upward with his shield.

Right away, Masato threw his sword arm forward into Takahisa's chest, but—

"N-Not yet!"

He shouldn't have been able to get into a defensive position, but Takahisa somehow recovered.

He swung with astonishing speed, colliding against Masato's sword with his own.

"Agh—"

Forced into a contest of raw strength, Masato's weapon was knocked skyward, spinning wildly for a good few seconds before it landed and rolled along the ground.

Masato wasn't happy with the result, glaring at Takahisa for obvious reasons.

"Oi, Aniki. You used reinforcement at the end. That's cheating! We agreed before we started: no powers!"

Masato was supposed to win that match, but Takahisa used his divine raiment's abilities.

"Ah... yeah, sorry. Guess I got too absorbed in it."

The older brother apologized awkwardly, hand rubbing the back of his neck.

"Tch, it's fine. But it's your loss, yeah?"

"Yeah. You win."

"Then you should do what you promised and go apologize to Miharu-oneechan. I know Haruto-anchan might have left already, and Satsuki-neechan

will come here soon enough, so it might be pointless to go back, but you need to stop insisting that we can't."

He protested soundly, Takahisa only looking nervous.

"... I got it. I'll give her a proper apology later."

It wasn't enough to satisfy him, but Masato wasn't going to push it any further.

"I'm holding you to that."

Ending the conversation on that, Masato started his swinging regimen to clear the gloomy weight on his shoulders.

Chapter 117: The Abnormal Event In the Capital of Earl Claire Territory, Creia

After saying his parting words to Satsuki and leaving Galwark kingdom, Rio went toward the territory of earl Clair, Celia's family, along with Aisia and Celia but.....

"EEH, YOU BECAME A HONORARY KNIGHT ! ? "

After leaving the royal capital of Galwark kingdom, in the middle of their way toward earl Claire territory via air travel, Rio reported to Celia that he became a honorary knight of Galwark kingdom.

Rio told the situation along the way but, maybe because the story was too unexpected, Celia was startled.

On the other hand, Aisia who flying right beside them isn't showing any reaction.

"Yes, how do you think about such a development"

Rio was unintentionally letting out a smile in seeing the difference between their reaction.

"Even if you say development, it's not a position that comes with such development right ! When, when did that happen ? "

On top of flying without hindrance, Celia who can't fly is being carried by Rio but, she suddenly brought her face even closer to Rio.

"Just a few days ago, at the final day of the evening party"

Rio is replying calmly to Celia who is already in a astonished state and lost majority of her composure.

"A~h....."

Celia's face suddenly turned slightly red when she noticed that their face is so close to each other.

After letting out a slightly shrill voice, she takes some appropriate distance.

"I-I can say that it's not an easy matter to become a honorary knight but..... What happened ? "

"There was a raid during the evening party. Though it seems their aim was the royalties, we managed to repel them by working together with the knights in the venue"

Rio quickly explained the detail of why he received the title of honorary knight.

"A raid during the evening party..... That's dangerous right. But, that might be just the right reward for you since you saved the life of royalties of several kingdoms. Moreover, it's supposed to be a position that shouldn't be easily given to a foreigner and yet....."

Celia's circuit is running on full power while she put her hand on her lips.

"Right"

Rio is shrugging his shoulders as he consented to her opinion. Since he is aware of how hard to achieve those titles for a foreigner like him. The honorary knight title isn't something that a king can readily give to someone.

Certainly one can't say that it's strange to giving it to Rio as long as they think of his achievement but, he can't help but wonder about what is the aim for giving such a title when it comes to an expert of trickery like Francois.

Though it's not like it'll cause any harm to him for the time being. For the sake of Satsuki aside, Rio will act as freely as he wants to since he has no intention to actively save that kingdom anyway.

And just at that time, groups of buildings at a far away place that seems to be the capital of earl Claire territory came to sight.

Aisia is calling to Rio almost at the same time.

"Haruto"

"I know. Sensei, let's land here for the time being"

Responding to Aisia, Rio is landing into the forest below while carrying Celia. Aisia also followed after them.

"What's the matter ? "

Celia asked that question after they land inside the forest.

"A flying object is approaching the city. We landed since things will become dangerous when they noticed that we're flying"

"Was that a magic ship ? "

"No, maybe some kind of living being. Though I think it's not a demon....."

"Fu~hn, I see"

Celia is showing a truly interested expression. When she hears that it is not a demon, it seems she feels that the situation isn't as dire as she expected.

"Let's run from this point. We should be able to arrive immediately till the city"

"That's okay but, I don't think that I will be able to follow after your speed"

Celia is what you call as a non-athletic person.

From the fact that she learns many type of magic as Almighty Wizard[All-Purpose Magician], though she can strengthen her physical ability with magic, she can't keep up with inhuman movements from someone like Rio and Aisia.

Rather, her brain is unable to keep up with her strengthened body.

Physical ability isn't something better as long as it becomes stronger. One needs motion sense to control the movement around the strengthened physical abilities.

Celia was naturally overwhelmingly lacking in those aspects. So making her to run inside of rugged terrain like a forest with bad footing is out of question.

"I'll run while carrying sensei then. Though it'll be more unstable than flying in the air, please bear with it"

"U-Uhm "

"P-Please take care of me then"

Celia is nodding while clinging even closer to Rio.

There's a tinge of red on her face.

.....

Before even half-of-an hour passed since then, Rio's finally arrived in their destination.

The capital of earl Claire territory, Creia—— it's location is in the eastern part of Bertram kingdom, it's a region where the main highway leads to Galwark kingdom.

And also the first time Rio came to visit.

The population is 50000 people, it's size is definitely up to the center of the territory and also the important trading point between east side and west side.

"That is, the airborne chivalric order of Bertram kingdom. What are they doing in this place?"

After coming even closer right beside the city by running on the highway, Celia said those words as she looked at the sky. By the way the princess carry state from before was cancelled just before they entered the highway.

The one who was wandering around the skies of the city was the airborne knights of Bertram kingdom who were riding on their griffon.

Griffon who is called as a heavenly lion is famous as one of the rulers of the sky, as long as the dragon kins are not included, along with their extremely high intelligence.

It has a wild disposition and although it lives mainly in the mountain region, it became a vehicle beast for those who tamed them in one part of the region, and because it's upper body resembling a bird of prey, it's "Kyuaa"-like cry became its main feature.

By the way, the name of the mercenary team led by Lucius, Rio's revenge target, is Griffon.

"Certainly, it's strange. What could be happened for them to go as far as dispatching the airborne chivalric order of tiger cub"

Rio was pondering about what happened while gazing at the sky.

"Uhm, what shall we do ? "

Celia is asking timidly while looking at the distant city.

"We have no choice but to enter the city right. Let's wander inside of the city to find out what just happened"

"Yup! "

Celia nodded with much enthusiasm. As expected, she is also worrying about what happened inside the city.

"Aisia, can you transform into your spirit form and wait inside my body ? Just an insurance for when the situation turns for the worst"

"Understood"

After giving a short reply, Aisia suddenly vanished and merged with Rio.

"Shall we go then"

The two of them then went toward the city.



And then, they are currently in a certain plaza outside the city rampart.

Celia surveyed the city from behind the hood that hides her face.

"It's not too lively here right. Or rather....."

"It seems that there's not that many..... unemployed or immigrants here right. Moreover, despite being outside of the rampart, the patrolling soldiers are passing by once in a while"

Because the area outside of the rampart is usually exempted from tax, it's usually prospering with people and many stalls lining up during peaceful time no matter which city.

But, no matter how much they're looking for it, there's only a few carts lining on the road and even fewer people buying goods.

Maybe because they lost the house where they live in, they see many families gathering together at the edge of the plaza.

"But, the ones who are patrolling aren't just the soldiers of this territory. considerable amount of the soldiers of the national force seems to mix amongst

the local soldiers. What just happened here....."

Celia's complexion paled, maybe because she is shaken by the transformation of her hometown.

In a normal situation, since one can act with a certain degree of freedom outside of the rampart, powerful people are also absent outside.

And yet, they spotted soldiers in here and there armed to the teeth. From the fact that they wore two different emblems, it seems it really goes as Celia says, the soldiers of the national army mixed amongst the local soldiers.

Though the autonomy of the territory are given to the local lord, the defense of the territory is a combination between the local soldiers and the national soldiers.

But, those two basically don't come out at the same time in normal situations. Since the king's army is watching the local lord's army, defense of the checking station, or fort that built along the highway.

Therefore, the defense of the local area is the full responsibility of the local army, outside of war time, the king's army basically will take "No-Intervention" attitude.

The current situation inside the city was a bit different.

"I never heard any rumor about war, as for the soldiers, I think they were looking for something or maybe being vigilant to something——"

Rio glanced at Celia as he said so.

Though it'll give another hint that the target they're looking for might be in these vicinity, she is currently the missing daughter of earl Claire.

But, 3 months has passed since Celia's disappearance from the capital.

When it comes to that, it makes no sense at all if they are really mobilizing such great amount of soldiers only to look for her.

In that case, they are looking for someone else.

There's another possibility that they were being vigilant about unknown things too.

"In any case, we might be under suspicion if we are reported wearing the hood. Though it's not like I'm overly worried about such things, maybe we should just show our face here"

After changing their hair color with a magic tool, the possibility of being noticed while showing their face is at minimum. It might be within acceptable range.

"You're right, let's not wear our hood"

Celia finally removed her hood after a slight hesitation. Thereupon, her hair color which turned from silver to gold appeared from inside.

"Cecilia, I think it's better for you to not appear near the earl mansion"

"uhn"

No matter how much she misses her house, she is currently in the state of disappeared. She cannot afford to go back to her family mansion.

In spite of spending majority of her time in the royal capital, he is expecting that many people can recognize Celia's face in her hometown. Especially the rich people who live in the rampart, there's a high possibility of the vassals who serve her house or the people who know about Celia is strolling around. Though it's hard to notice her at glance, the risk is rising even further inside than outside of the rampart.

That's why, on the way toward this place, they're trying to find the means to meet with Celia's father again.

Next is practically whether they can sneak in or not, Rio just made a preliminary preparation.

"Will you take a rest since we have chosen to go outside of the rampart for a brief rest ? Since I'm going to gather information about the situation inside of the rampart in the meantime"

"Yeah. But, can we stroll outside the rampart for a while longer ? I want to see the condition of the people who live in this city"

Celia is asking so while looking up at Rio's face with a please expression.

It doesn't mean that she doesn't know the living condition of the people who

live outside of the rampart.

"I don't mind you know. But, please stay close to me"

"Naturally ! Thank you, Haruto"

After Rio accepted her request, Celia is smiling happily at him.

"Well then, is there some place that you wish to see ? "

"Uhm, I almost never go out of the rampart but, I want to stroll around for the time being....."

"In that case, we will be circling around outside the rampart huh. Let's go"

Thus, the two of them were strolling outside of the rampart.

.....

And then, almost half of an hour passed since then.

Rio's looking at the living condition of the people who live outside of the rampart.

And then, the things they noticed after circling around was the fact that the homeless people were more than they expected.

When they go even a bit deeper into the slum, they discovered emaciated people leaning on the wall already on the verge of blacking out.

Probing like line of sight sent a few times toward Celia whose eye's are wandering around as if to survey the surrounding people.

In exchange for Celia who doesn't notice such gazes, Rio is looking at them with cold eyes.

Thereupon, along with the effect of the sword that is glittering on his waist, those people instantly turned away their line of sight.

But, at that time a boy who is sitting on the ground suddenly standing up. His age is around 10 years old.

Though Rio is aware of that boy's movement, he decided to leave him alone for the time being.

When the boy is sneaking into the blindspot of Rio and Celia, he rushed with a

half-run and then bumped into Celia.

"M-My apologies"

After falling down with a unnatural position and then standing up again with unsteady gait, the boy is quickly bowing his head to her.

"Ah, it's okay. Are you alright ? "

Though the one who bumped into her was the boy, Celia kindly asked the boy's condition.

"Yes. Well then"

The boy gave a brief reply and about to left from there, but——

"....."

Rio is grasping tightly on that boy hand.

"Cecilia, please check your wallet"

He said so to Celia.

"EH? "

Though she wore an expression as if there's a huge question mark on top of her head, Celia's still following what Rio asked her.

"AH....."

Celia instantly noticed that she lost her wallet.

"Can you return the thing that you stole from her"

Rio is saying those words to the boy with a chilling voice.

"EH? W-What are you talking about ? "

The boy is feigning his ignorance while saying those words in a high-pitched tone.

"You're carrying the wallet in your other hand"

Rio is heaving a sigh and then pulling the boy toward him. And then quickly snatched back the fine quality leather wallet from that boy's hand.

The boy caught red-handed. He can't make any excuse, in a normal situation

that is, and yet.

"R-RETURN IT BACK ! THAT IS MINE ! "

The boy is shouting in a frantic voice while desperately trying to reclaim the wallet from Rio.

But, his hand is quickly seized by Rio who then twisted it to the back.

"GA!"

The boy's face is warped due to the pain.

"WA-RI- H-Haruto"

Though she almost call him [Rio] in a moment of panic, Celia instantly changed it to [Haruto].

But, Rio isn't responding to her call, he released the boy after pushing him lightly from the back.

The boy who lost his balance is tumbling on the ground.

"I'll overlook your action as long as you leave immediately"

Rio is saying those bone chilling words while releasing his killing intent.

Basically, the officials can't do anything in the case of pickpocket which happened outside of the rampart.

It's one own responsibilities to keep themselves safe, including delivering the punishment.

For example, if the one who caught the boy pickpocketing is those rough adventurers, the boy might be beaten till the adventurer feels satisfied.

Therefore, Rio who released that boy with just a warning— Which can also be counted as the boy's luck— Is the way to show his kindness.

But, Celia gasped for a moment in hearing those words coming out from Rio who rarely shows his emotion..

Thereupon, the boy who grasped the difference between their abilities also trembled in fear.

The boy then looked around the place where he fallen to.

Though there was a few adults who sit quietly here, they're suddenly turning their line of sight from the boy.

Though they seem like this boy's guardian or comrade, they abandoned him.

"D-Damn it....."

The boy is standing in a crawling-like manner and then left that place with a unsteady gait.

His figure was extremely miserable.

"Let's go"

Rio is seizing Celia's hand and then started to walk very quickly.

"H-Hey Haruto....."

When their hand separated a while later, Celia who is seemingly worried about him is calling him from the back.

Somehow she feels suffocated and can't help but call to Rio.

Rio stopped his gait and then turned around with a troubled expression.

"I-It's about the things that just happened....."

"I'm sorry. That is maybe a mistake that I did as a person. But, I have no choice but to do that at that place"

Certainly if he were to give charity to that boy right there, the surrounding people will definitely flock around them.

Celia also understands about that, but——

"..... Couldn't we do something for him ? "

Celia couldn't help but to think—— about the aftertaste of the mischief.

"Cecilia is kind"

Even back when he was in the royal academy, Celia is the only one who was gentle toward an orphan like Rio. That is also the reason why she keeps worrying about the incident just now.

"That's not true"

Celia is denying Rio with a unpleasant tone.

Celia heaved a sigh at her own powerless self—— the current her is unable to even save a troubled person which is her duty as a noble.

"A right conduct doesn't always come with the right result. If we give the wallet only to the boy, the people in the surrounding will definitely surround us in one go"

Penniless people have no choice but to do that.

As long as there's someone who will save them, they'll swarm that place.

If the saviour is moody, those people will shout things like unfair or get angry for no reason.

They have no such things as consideration or discretion.

They just want to be saved, it's akin to instinct for them.

All the more if they are swarming the other party. They won't complain as long as they get the result, and they'll complain if the result isn't up to their expectation. There'll be no end to them if Rio and Celia is to deal with each of them.

Therefore Rio showed such harsh attitude toward them. He only did what he needed to do.

The result was something that is unpleasant for Celia.

Celia kept her silent.

(Well, not everything will go as I wish)

When Rio is heaving a sigh and,

"Let's head towards our inn then"

He proposed so.

"Yeah. I'm sorry. For saying such strange things....."

"Not at all"

Rio resumed his gait to find an inn after shaking his head lightly to the still weary Celia.

After that they were booking a double room in the comparatively better inn amongst the inns outside of the rampart and then, Rio sneaked into the city to gather information.

But, he couldn't get any noteworthy information. After confirming the information about the defense of the mansion and the building in the vicinity, Rio decided to return to the inn to meet Celia.

.....

"The defense of the mansion is quite strict. And it seems that they aren't just using the territory army, even the national soldiers is mixing amongst the defense. Though the situation of the city is obviously strange, shall we infiltrate as we planned before ? Naturally, we have to set the time if we choose to infiltrate"

Rio asked that question after he inspected the mansion and then returned to the inn where Celia staying at.

"..... If infiltration is possible..... I want to try it. But, there's no need to force yourself if the risk of being discovered is high. I mean, even the spirit arts which will make you transparent isn't completely safe right ? "

Celia is replying with a reserved tone. Based on the situation of the city that they saw up till now, it's natural for her to feel uneasy about what just happened in the city.

By the way, the optical camouflage spirit arts is weak against outside interference.

When strong wind is blowing, strong air resistance that is caused when he runs at high speed, and the tremor in the air which is caused by collision between something and the air.

Therefore, in such situation where he touches something, or go through a crowded area, the use of that spirit art is extremely restricted.

"Certainly. Though it's not so difficult if they just sneaking into the garden by making their body transparent, the matter of entering the mansion is several times higher in difficulty. Since the main entrance is heavily guarded, there's no gap in their defense"

If the one they're going to infiltrate is a big castle, it'll be easier to find the gap in their defense.

But, the level of the noble mansion is small, it's hard to find a gap in their defense.

As for Rio, as long as there's windows he will try to infiltrate the mansion from there but, in spite of opening the windows, they have to undo the spirit art.

Moreover, since there'll be fire kindled around the mansion, it'll definitely be unpleasant if the residence saw a floating person.

"I see....."

"Well, they won't be able to find us even if by some off-chance they found us, as long as we secure our escape route, there's a worth in trying to sneaking in"

Rio added one information after another while giving light ideas to Celia who showed a cloudy expression.

If for example the other side found out about their identity, they need to prepare a suitable alibi for when they're examined.

But, it means that they can act in a more bold manner if not for such a restriction.

"..... If it's not so difficult to enter the garden, there's a route for infiltration. There's a hidden passage under the garden which leads toward the mansion. Only the people of the mansion know about its existence"

"That..... Is it okay to let me know about such a secret ? "

Rio asked timidly to Celia who explained about the hidden passage to him.

"Maybe I shouldn't do that..... But, it's okay since it's Rio. I trust you. You won't tell anyone about it right"

Celia is saying so while smiling at him. She showed a warm smile as she told Rio about the fact that she really trusts him.

"Yes"

Rio felt slightly embarrassed.

.....

And then, late at night when even the plants fell asleep.

Rio is bringing along Celia to infiltrate into the mansion of earl Claire. The rented inn that they used for a short break before is vacated so that no one can trace them.

They're on top of a small hill.

The patrolling soldiers were walking around at every corner, he feels that even an ordinary master won't be able to infiltrate into the garden.

But, for Rio who can fly with spirit arts, it is not that difficult to enter the garden which is left open under the cover of the night.

The problem is that they might meet some people who have keen magic perception, or it's protected by a magic barrier.

But, both of those cases were the extreme case, even if they were discovered by off chance, no need to be afraid of being caught as long as they fly in the air in the case they were discovered.

No pain no gain. The risk is still within acceptable areas.

Though currently Rio is strolling around in the back yard by using optical camouflage spirit arts, no one in the mansion noticed him.

The guards in the backyard isn't as many as the guards at the front gate, Rio is chasing after Celia who became his guide.

"Here is the place"

Even if they can hide their figure with optical camouflage spirit arts, it can't hide their voice, thus Celia is speaking with a low voice.

"I'm sure that it is around here....."

Celia is touching the stone pavement on the ground after they come to the water fountain at the edge of the garden,

The spraying water is causing ripple in the air when it touched the optical camouflage membrane.

(This is bad)

After confirming that no one is around, Rio released the optical camouflage immediately.

"Found it. HEAVE-HO ! "

It seems Celia found the entrance to the secret passage.

After fiddling the ground with both of her hand, she then pulled the ground like when one's using a sliding door.

But, the powerless Celia have not enough power to move that stone door,

"Help me"

When a slight gap is revealed, Rio is coming to help her and then opened the sliding entrance in one go. Thereupon, the stairs that led to the underground appear.

"T-Thank you....."

"It's nothing, we should enter quickly before we are discovered"

"uhn"

The two of them descended down the stairs that led to underground.

While Rio is going back to shut the entrance, Celia lit the magic tool for lightening which is furnished along the wall.

When the underground passage became brighter, those two then continued to descend.

They're leaving to an open space after walking for a while.

There's a staircase which led above in front of them, Rio was looking carefully at the room and found that there's doors on both of their sides.

"This place is....."

"Just right under the mansion. You can even use this place as an emergency living place you know. Well, no one is here for the time being....."

When Rio and Celia have such a conversation, the door on their side suddenly flung open.

The one who appeared from that door was a beautiful girl with a sharp

expression.

The elegant and beautiful girl with her long and straight purple colored hair along with her deep purple eyes is bringing about a different feeling than just beautiful or lovely. She's around the same age as Rio.

The girl is wearing a lovely noble attire with purple color as it's base and pure white poncho from above.

The girl eyes opened wide when she noticed that Rio-tachi is standing in the passage.

Rio is stepping forward to hide the figure of Celia behind him as if to protect her.

"Vanessa ! "

When the girl is shouting that name, a different girl appeared from inside the door. Her age might be around the midst of her twenties. She's wearing a knight attire with a slender and polished sword hanging on her hip.

When the female knight is looking at Rio,

"Who are you people ? "

She put herself on guard with a sharp expression on her face

Chapter 118: Fighting in the Basement

The woman named Vanessa stepped toward Rio. She left her weapon sheathed—likely because she had no intention of killing him—but the look in her eyes was dangerous all the same. Rio's eyes widened, and he shifted a foot forward as he prepared to intercept her.

In an instant Vanessa cleared the gap, and grabbed at Rio to restrain him. He batted her hands away with ease, moving to lock her down himself, but—

"!"

Vanessa shook him off and thrust the back of her hand out to strike his abdomen, but Rio parried it again, knocking it upward.

"Cecilia, back in the passage!"

"Please step back, Vanessa!"

The voices of Rio and the purple-haired girl overlapped, and Vanessa was the first to react.

"«Photon Bullet»!"

The purple-haired girl held her palm forward, and fired off three balls of light from the magic formation that appeared. Their lethality was low, but they still packed enough of a punch to break some bones, so Rio strengthened himself with his spirit arts and braced himself; he paid some extra mind to strengthen his hands more than the rest of his body.

Forearm, shoulder, torso—the girl's bullets were aimed to render him incapable of fighting, and if he avoided them they'd hit Celia. Mentally praising the girl for her pinpoint accuracy, his hands followed each one.

"Wha..."

Accompanied by a loud crashing noise, all three bullets vanished. Everyone who saw it, even Celia, was left shocked by the feat, and Rio was free to kick off the ground and move in unhindered.

He moved behind Vanessa before she could respond, immobilizing her arms

around her back. At the same time, he managed to get himself closer to the purple-haired girl without putting Celia at risk.

"Lady Christina! Don't worry about me, this man is—!"

Apparently, Vanessa was the type to choose death over capture. It was an admirable way of thinking.

"... Eh?"

Surprised by what Vanessa had shouted, Celia unintentionally let out a voice that made Rio pause.

Christina—he knew that name as well. She was the first princess of Beltram, one of Celia's former students, and a girl deeply connected to Rio.

It could have just as easily been someone with the same name, but he was skeptical that things would be that easy even in as unlikely a place as this basement. He turned his eyes toward her, and upon closer inspection the girl bore an uncanny resemblance to the one he knew a few years ago.

It appears... she's going to be causing me trouble again.

He would have been lying if he said he wasn't interested in why the princess of a kingdom was living in a place like this, but he was ready to leave at a moment's notice. More accurately, he figured things were only going to go downhill if he stuck around. However, without any information on things, it wasn't a good idea to let his past get in the way here.

Besides, from Celia's point of view as a noble of Beltram, she wasn't going to ignore one of her own princesses hidden in her family's mansion. He decided to leave the talking to her.

Fortunately, despite her readiness, Christina hesitated to attack with Vanessa taken hostage. They had a chance to speak, and maybe calm down. Unfortunately, sensing that she was the reason for the delay, Vanessa made a mortifying declaration.

"Kh... Just kill me already!"

Although caught off-guard by her decision, before Rio could tell her he had no intention of doing such a thing, one of the doors that had been closed during

the entire exchange swung open. From the other side came a pair of boys in their mid-teens. They looked Japanese.

"... What's going on? What the..."

They still seemed half-asleep, but the boys woke up when they realized they had no idea what was happening.

"Nobody move."

Rio was curious about them, but he had no room to let his guard down, and soon enough the air grew tense again. The only noise for a moment was the Japanese-looking boys gulping loudly, and Rio wanted to settle things before they possibly misunderstood things.

"Cecilia, over here."

"Ah, mh."

"I'll leave the rest to you."

"Understood. Thank you."

Celia nodded and revealed herself more clearly to the others. Maybe because the person looking at her was the person they thought she was, Celia briefly looked surprised, then immediately kneeled as befitting her station.

"Lady Christina."

"Who...?"

"I am Celia, eldest daughter of the house of Earl Claire. I apologize for my long absence, Your Highness."

With Celia's recognition, there was no doubt the purple-haired girl was indeed Christina Beltram. She'd certainly grown more beautiful in her teens, and the raw dignity she exuded grew with her. Rio smiled dryly at his suspicions being confirmed, and Christina's hostility disappeared.

"Miss Celia? But your hair? And weren't you supposed to be missing? Why are you here?"

"I've been in hiding for the last few months. I was waiting for things to die down so I could meet with my father..."

As expected, she explained things clearly without leaking the important details. On the other hand, Rio finally released Vanessa after watching the situation cool off.

"Excuse me. Please pardon our rudeness."

"No, we were the ones who made the first move. We couldn't afford to be found. Sorry."

While Celia and Christina exchanged information, Rio and Vanessa exchanged apologies.

"However, I'm surprised how well you managed to evade the guards. There should have been a large search team all over the place."

"That's a... difficult question to answer. But, a search team? Your Highness, are you...?"

"... Yes. I managed to escape from the castle, but we were forced to hide because our pursuers caught up with us. I'm terribly sorry to become such a burden on the Claire family."

"Not at all. If the princess is in trouble, there's no helping it."

Even without the full story, Celia didn't mind. Earl Claire, Celia's father, was fiercely loyal to the kingdom's royalty. They had nothing to do with the factions behind Dukes Albou and Huguenot. Knowing the Albou faction were liable to do as they pleased, and having sheltered Christina, Celia agreed expecting her father to still be here.

"You have my deepest gratitude. Please, stand."

"Pardon me, then."

"Now I'm sure we both have much to talk about, but may I ask for the name of the gentleman with you?"

Christina turned a pointed gaze to Rio.

"Um, this is..."

"Your Highness, would you forgive my rudeness if I were to introduce myself?"

Rio took the heat off Celia, right hand to his chest in respect to the princess.

"... I don't mind."

"My name is Haruto Amakawa, an honorary knight of Galwark Kingdom. I'm here serving as Miss Celia's escort."

"Why is a knight of Galwark here of all places..."

"Is there any evidence to support your claim?"

After Rio completed his introduction, Vanessa and Christina were both shocked. The latter was the only one to remain entirely calm.

"This is the insignia given to me by His Majesty, King Francois."

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He showed them the insignia affixed to his collar, and Christina had Vanessa confirm its legitimacy.

"Excuse me... It's true. I couldn't say if this was one of an honorary knight, but without a doubt the crest belongs to Galwark Kingdom."

"I see. Then we'll trust you. Still... Have we met somewhere before?"

As if feeling like something just wasn't right, Christina tilted her head and inspected him a little more carefully.

"... No, I don't believe so."

Naturally, he denied it with his rock solid poker face, reflecting back on the party just a short while ago.

So Flora's intuition wasn't just a one-off...

By his side, Celia stiffened a little and tried to change the topic.

"Your Highness, rather than standing down here, why don't we continue this inside? The dining room should be close by."

"Yes, I agree."

"In that case, allow me to excuse myself."

Rio planned to stay out of this. It wouldn't have been prudent to hear secret information like this, but Christina shook her head.

"If possible, I'd rather you join us."

"But, I'm just an outsider here."

Admittedly, it was a modest resistance at best, not wanting to be half-forced into listening in on conversations that had little to nothing to do with him. Christina didn't really have the authority to give an order to a foreign dignitary like Rio, but they were still in Beltram. With the situation in Beltram and the relationship between the kingdoms, it wasn't a good idea to give them any reason for hostility.

"You're a noble of Galwark. There's no trouble if it's someone like you, appointed as an honorary knight at your age. Miss Celia seems to trust you quite a lot as well."

Christina looked at Celia as if trying to get at her and Rio's connection to each other. Rio considered how to respond, but Celia kneeled once more.

"... Your Highness, I can attest that Haruto is trustworthy. However, I don't want my benefactor to be involved in this if he doesn't have to be. Please allow him to leave if the story you're about to tell shouldn't be heard..."

The princess was startled, but soon answered with a wry smile.

"Sorry. I spoke thoughtlessly. Getting him caught up in our own problems wasn't my intent; I simply wanted to know about what was going on in Galwark. Of course, I won't pry for any more than you're willing to say."

When she finished, Celia found it hard to keep insisting otherwise. She turned to Rio apologetically, garnering an ever so slight grin in response. And having already gotten enough of a grasp on the situation, he choked down his desire to get out of Dodge.

"So be it. I'll be happy to accompany you."

"My thanks. Let's go back inside then. Vanessa, you too. Ah, before we do, I forgot to introduce her. Miss Celia, about Vanessa..."

Christina looked back at Celia.

"Yes, I'm already aware. Our houses are associated with each other."

"I see. Your houses belong to the same faction, after all. Then Vanessa, please

introduce yourself to Sir Arakawa."

"Vanessa Emal. I'm sorry for my previous discourtesy."

"Emal? Are you perhaps related to Alfred, the [Sword of the King]?"

Rio's eyes widened a little. When the name Sword of the King came to mind, the only other person he knew of was Lucius, his mother's murderer.

"Alfred Emal is my older brother. Are you an acquaintance of his?"

"Not directly, no. But I don't think there's anyone interested in the sword who doesn't know of his fame."

On the contrary, he had met Alfred once before. It happened during his interrogation in prison after saving Christina and Flora. At the time, he had no idea about any connection between Alfred and Lucius.

"I see..."

Vanessa briefly seemed like she was proud about it, but she looked somewhat down until Rio changed the topic.

"This is getting a little off track; my bad. Haruto Amakawa. It's a pleasure to meet you properly."

Similarly to before, Rio placed his right hand to his chest and bowed lightly. After they finished with the formalities, Christina spoke again to lead them inside.

"Well then, shall we go?"

"Um, we're..."

Then one of the boys timidly spoke up, forgotten the entire time. Christina answered them with a gentle tone.

"You two can return to your room."

"Ah, alright. We got it."

The boy who responded nodded absentmindedly, and they left the group alone.

"Lady Christina, who are they?"

"They are... It's a long story. They were pulled into this world during the hero summoning. I'll have to explain the details later..."

Christina knitted her eyebrows as she talked about them.

"I see. Then that as well, we can worry about it once we're in the dining room."

The women made their way inside, with Rio following at their backs. As they walked, he couldn't keep down the feeling that the direction things were going was...

This is just getting weirder and weirder.

Chapter 119: Discussion in the Basement

After entering the dining room, Rio is taking the initiative to come to use the service and headed toward the kitchen. He's persistently taking the stand of a third party.

Nevertheless, since the simple kitchen and the dining room is in the same room, he can still hear their conversation.

"Sensei, if you want to meet your father above, you should wait since he will go down to this basement by tomorrow morning. It seems that everyone of the searching group is lodging in this mansion, that's why it's hard to move around"

So Christina told the information that Celia wanted to hear the most first.

"I see. Fortunately I felt that visiting the royal capital will end as a fool's errand. In that case, father has been waiting for me to come to my home"

"Yes. Since we have a lot of time till he comes down, please fill me with your stories till that time"

After the conversation reached this point, the two of them are looking at each other.

"M-May I ask what kind of discussion it is ? "

Celia is saying so to probe Christina's reaction.

"That's right. Maybe the matter both of us most worried about is how both of us sneaked out of the castle right ? As far as I know, there's a rumor saying that sensei is kidnapped inside the castle"

"I'm not kidnapped. I left the castle on my own will"

"May I implore the reason ? "

Christina who is asking that question was looking right into Celia's eye.

As their line of sight meet, Celia's eye become gloomy.

"..... Though it's embarrassing, the reason why I left the castle is because I want to escape from the duty that is imposed to me as a noble"

"That should be from political marriage with Charles Albo right ? "

"Yes. Sometime we have to marry someone who we don't love. That is the mission imposed to the woman of a noble family. But then, I couldn't bring myself to agree to a political marriage with him"

Looking down, Celia said those words with a emotional voice.

"Well, that's natural right. I think you made the right judgement"

Christina is readily supporting Celia's choice.

Celia's eyes opened wide as if she just heard unexpected words. Christina is unintentionally letting out a chuckling sound as she continued her words.

"Certainly, we were in the position where we can't choose our own husband. But, that is not only for the house, it's also for the kingdom. That kind of political marriage isn't justified—— No, political marriage which will only cause a harm isn't worth at all"

"Your highness, will my marriage with him cause harm to the kingdom ? "

Celia asked that question in hearing Christina going as far as saying that her political marriage is harmful for the kingdom.

"Depending on the situation, that man is an existence that is currently harming the kingdom. The reason sensei left the castle is also because you're thinking the same thing right ? "

"..... Yeah, no doubt about it. Me leaving is the result is down to their overly coercive way to do things"

"You're not confident in yourself ? "

"The one who decided whether I'm doing the right thing or not isn't me"

Celia is showing an ambiguous expression.

"Then, have you regretted your action ? of leaving the castle"

"No, my only regret is if I'm not doing it"

Now, Celia is shaking her head to show her answer. Thereupon, Christina is smiling at her.

"In that case, it's okay right"

So she said.

"Naturally people who deny Celia-sensei's decision also exist amongst the nobilities. But, I felt that the way duke Albo is doing things is wrong. I thought that leaving the castle is the correct choice. Keep that will. And do not regret it"

Saying so, Christina's deep purple eyes is looking straight into Celia's eyes.

Celia also stared back at Christina.

"In that case, whether that decision of yours is correct will be decided after this. And, the one who decided it is us who live in this kingdom..... At least I'm supporting your decision"

"I'm really happy if there's someone who says so but....."

Celia is showing a slightly troubled smile.

"In other words, the most important thing is what Celia-sensei wanted to do after this right ? That is to say that you came back to this mansion since you can't leave it behind as the noble of our kingdom right ? "

"Does the current me..... Have that kind of qualification....."

Celia replied so to Christina with a troubled face.

"Oops, I think you have that qualification you know. My future is also hidden with my escape but I never thought of abandoning the matter of me being a royalty. Everything that will happen to this kingdom or what will left from it—— I've been thinking about everything that might happen "

"..... I see"

Celia is groaning in a low voice in hearing Christina say those words with a resolute tone.

Though Celia is thinking the same things as her, she didn't have Christina's confidence.

She can feel a powerful determination when she is looking at Christina.

It doesn't mean that she might not be worried. There's no way for her, who slipped out from the castle even while fully aware of her standing as a princess

not worrying about anything.

As someone who is ignorant in the way of the world, maybe she'll just become carefree and almost reckless person if she were not worrying about anything.

And, Celia knows that Christina isn't that kind of a person.

Thus, Celia wanted to know—— Why Christina escaped from the castle.

"May I ask a question, Christina-sama ? "

"Yes, you may"

Christina readily consented to Celia request.

"I wonder why your highness escaped from the castle ? "

"Because I became a hindrance to duke Albo—— No, it's because I lost my utility value. I sneaked out from the castle since I felt that my life is in danger"

Celia's face slightly stiffened in hearing her not so calm voice.

"Don't tell me, duke Albo is going to dispose you ? "

"Yeah, the current him might do so. He is winning over the summoned hero while losing his constraint toward royalty"

"But, the only reason for duke Albo to aim for your highnesses life is....."

"That man is full of ambition. Except for the current royalty, he should be planning to make the next king to come from the house of duke Albo"

"Is that why he's planning to kill your highness ? Doesn't he know that doing such things won't amount to anything ? "

The throne of Bertram kingdom is passed down by heredity.

There's a qualification for the right to inherit the throne from the highest person, a direct descendant of the king is an absolute requirement, the legitimate birth and male descendant is decided with national law with higher ordered one taking the priority.

When the rightful inheritor is lost with reason such as revocation of status, renunciation or death, as long as there's no new legitimate male heir born in

the situation where no one but legitimate female heir left, the order of throne inheritance right can't be overturned.

Currently, the rightful heir of the throne is the 1st princess Christina and the 2nd princess Flora who was born between the lawful wife Beatrice and king Phillip the 3rd, and the concubine born children ranked below them.

Though the youngest daughter of duke Albo also married king Phillip the 3rd, the order of inheritance right of the throne for the children who was born between them are extremely low.

Even so, as long as someone with higher order for inheritance right is having a new child, the lower order of throne inheritance right must step back, so killing just one or two person of higher order is meaningless.

Though it doesn't mean that assassination attempt never happened in the past, the people who directly gained a rise in their order from the assassination definitely became the suspect, it's a double-edged sword that will sow more trouble later on.

In addition, since the authority of Bertram kingdom royal family is backed by the six wise gods, harming the royal family is similar to a rebellion against god.

No matter how much real power they wield, also for the sake of guarantee the legitimacy of the reign, they have no choice but to disregard social appearance and show minimum courtesy.

That's why duke Albo — Despite his high background as a military officer — have to adopt peaceful method of transferring the real power from king Phillip the 3rd, going by usurpation of the throne is a no no.

And yet, here the situation, duke Albo is going as far as overstepping the line when things turned unfavorable to him, simply not a calming story,

"Yeah, it's as Celia-sensei said. It was difficult to realize that man's ambition up till now"

Christina is saying so while heaving a deep sigh.

"But, what has happened to cause such change ? "

When Celia is gulping, Christina nodded to her.

"It's vexing but, the summoned hero made that man's ambition become possible. That man is trying to make his grand daughter to marry the hero as his legal wife. By doing so he is planning to support the child born between them as the next king of Bertram kingdom"

When Christina is saying so, Celia's face is showing a great change.

"The grand daughter of duke Albo is, Loris-sama right ? Certainly such things is possible..... But, the kingdom will split into two. For him to overturn the order of throne inheritance by ignoring the national law"

Honestly speaking, the proper path should be to make the 1st princess Christina or the 2nd princess Flora as second in-line to marry the hero to raise the royal family authority even higher.

The hero is the apostle of six wise god, that's why they have more or equal authority with the king, even when they were to accidentally marry someone of lower order of throne inheritance, the child born between those couple can contend the throne for the next king with the first-in-line.

It won't do any real harm if they were to marry someone without any status or authority but, it's different story when they were engaged with someone who have both status and authority, it'll turn into an unbelievably messy situation.

And then, if it's as Christina said, the current duke Albo have no mind to consider such situation and in full support to engaging his grand daughter to the hero and supporting the child born between them as the next king——

In that case, even saying that he is definitely an existence that will harm the country won't interfere his intention—— So, Celia thought in that instant.

"Bertram kingdom already divided. That must be why duke Albo doesn't dare to let me to approach the hero. That's why I almost have no freedom to act after the hero is summoned"

A smile that is mixed between anger and surprise showed on Christina's face as she said those words.

"The situation already progressed this far while I'm in the escape right. Being keep in the dark makes me more ashamed of myself"

Celia's face is frowned due to her feeling ashamed of herself.

"My deepest apologies for interrupting in the middle of conversation. I prepared a warm beverage. Here you go"

Thereupon, Rio returned from the simple kitchen.

The sweet and fragrant aroma that is drifting from the 4 porcelain tea cups on top of the tray is—— The aroma of citrus of tachibana variety.

Celia is taking a deep breath and managed to calm her mind.

"Thank you, Haruto. This is....."

"Hot lemonade. I also mixed grated apple and honey in it"

"It's delicious. My deepest gratitude for this beverage"

Celia showed a gentle smile to him. It's a soothing smile that will heal anyone who sees it.

"You're welcome, please be careful not to burn your tongue since it's hot"

Rio is smiling back at her as he proceeded to place the tea cups to everyone.

"Thank you very much. If you're okay with it, please have a seat too. Lord Amakawa"

Christina said those words to Rio.

"Excuse me"

After saying those words, Rio then sat on the seat next to Celia.

"I can assure you that there's no poison in it but, feel free to do poison tasting first. I won't take that as an offence"

Adding on, Rio asked to Christina and Vanessa who sat in front of him whether they want to do a poison test first.

The necessity to do poison test inside the tea that is made by Rio who they met for the first time for Christina who is royalty is taking the highest priority.

Though Christina-tachi doesn't even think to consider that poison will put in the tea, maybe because such action is so cliché to the point of it is almost like formal ceremony.

Therefore, with such proposal coming from himself, Rio decided to make an atmosphere to ease the poison tasting.

"I'm truly obliged by your consideration. In that case, let me to— —"

"It's okay. Let me to drink it"

Christina is drinking the tea without any kind of hesitation while ignoring Vanessa who about to perform poison test.

"Ara, it's delicious"

Christina is telling her impression with a surprised face.

"Y-Your highness ! "

Vanessa who was taken aback by her action protested to her lord with a panicked voice.

"I don't mind. If he really wants to kill us, he would already done so long time ago. He could do that during the combat when we first met him"

"You're..... Right about it"

Vanessa who's pressing Christina who is talking with such a calm tone is at a loss for words.

"I trust Celia-sensei. I also trust someone who got her trust"

Maybe due to her being tolerant, or she simply just resigned to her fate, Christina readily said those words.

"..... Understood"

Vanessa is giving in while heaving a sigh. After she sipped her tea, the unexpected sweetness is spreading in her mouth made her perplexed.

"By the way, lord Amakawa. May I ask few questions ? "

Christina is looking at Rio as she asked that.

"Naturally. But, only within the scope that I'm allowed to answer"

Rio readily gave his consent while shrugging his shoulder.

"My gratitude. Well then, first is regarding your relationship with Celia-sensei. You're escorting her all the way to this place, could it be that Celia-sensei's

break-out from royal castle have something to do with you ? "

"Yeah, Celia-sama is my benefactor. I helped her to escape from the royal castle to return my gratitude"

"I'm the one who asked Haruto to do so. Christina-sama"

When Rio is speaking as if he is the one who is responsible to let Celia escape from the royal castle, Celia added her own words to his explanation. Maybe because she wanted to bear the responsibility of escaping from the royal castle to be her alone.

"..... I see. Then is Galwark kingdom not involved in the matter of Celia-sensei's escape ? "

Christina is asking that question with her eyes locking at his face.

"Yes. Or rather they were completely unrelated to that matter, since my investiture as the honorary knight of Galwark kingdom is happened just few days ago"

Rio is readily answering her question.

"You became honorary knight just a few days ago ? "

Christina showed a slightly perplexed face. But, she received even more shock in hearing Rio's next words.

"Yeah, just a few days ago. Before that I'm just a wanderer, and commoner on top of that"

"..... A commoner ? But in regard to that, your action is brimming with an extremely refined elegance. Not in the least inferior to a young noble at all"

And then, Christina is praising Rio's manners.

"It's my honor to hear such undeserved praise"

Rio is bowing as he showed an insincere smile to her.

(He was a commoner. And then, the benefactor of Celia-sensei. But, what was his relationship with sensei who was always locked in her laboratory. Is it when she is coming home ? Or else——)

Christina is still doubting herself somewhere while looking at Rio as if trying to

recall something.

"Hey, this is unrelated to the situation but, how long since you became Celia-sensei's acquaintance ? "

"It should be close to 10 years by now"

"Almost..... 10 years"

Maybe it was around the time she entered Bertram kingdom royal academy, immature in many aspect, and yet receiving various praise from her surroundings, she became too proud of her own and misunderstood herself—— is what Christina is thinking about.

The shameful past that has no relation to the current situation and yet she is recalling about that past.

And yet, Christina closed the door of the memories that is hidden in the deepest part of her heart despite showing a complicated expression.

"Is there something on my face ? "

Rio is asking to her as he can sense the slight change on her expression.

"..... No, it's nothing"

Christina slowly shook her head.

Though it'll be a lie if she said that she is not anxious about Haruto and Celia's relationship, now isn't the time for her to straying from the main topic.

And, she decided to hold back her curiosity as she can't afford to hurt Haruto's feelings by prying in his private matter anymore than this.

"Let's get back to the topic. Since Galwark kingdom didn't participate in this matter, I can assume that you rescued Celia-sensei as an individual right ? "

"Yes. It's as you say"

Rio is agreeing immediately.

"Considering about the security measure within the castle, it might be hard to believe but..... It seems I have no choice but to trust it since you managed to infiltrate into this place. Though I feel uneasy about the method that you're using for it"

Christina is squinting her eyes as she said so.

"It'll save a lot of trouble for me if I'm allowed to keep my method a secret. Since it'll put me in various kinds of dangerous situations"

Rio who nonchalantly rejecting indirect appeal of disclosure of information from Christina is looking straight into her eyes.

".....I Understand. Well, I think it's okay. I won't ask any further since thanks to that Celia-sensei is here right now"

Christina is heaving a deep sigh after several seconds of staring contest with Rio.

"I'm truly obliged with your kindness"

Rio bowed to her to show his gratitude.

"But in exchange, may I hear the recent situation of Galwark kingdom ? I don't mind to hear even if it's just general situation"

"Certainly. That's right. Well, have you hear the news about the invitation from Galwark kingdom to participating in the debut party of their hero, Satsuki Sumeragi which just finished few days ago? "

Rio decided to tell her the information regarding the evening party. Christina is showing her interest in that information.

"No, this is the first time I heard about it. Since there was a regulation of information outside the castle. Did you attend that party? "

"Yes. The Bertram kingdom side who opposed duke Albo also attending that party. The current name of their group is [Restoration]"

Christina's eyebrows twitched in hearing the name of anti-Albo faction, [Restoration].

"Could it be that the true leader of [Restoration] is someone called duke Euguno. Then, Flora is....."

"She is alive and kicking. I was also blessed by a fortune to have a short conversation with Flora-sama. She's currently with the hero, Hiroaki Sakata-sama"

Rio is replying calmly to the question that is timidly asked by Christina. Thereupon, Christina heaved a relieved sigh.

"I see, she's safe and well. Glad to hear that"

Though it's just short words, her lips loosened a little and she sounded really delighted when she said those words.

That just how much she cherishes her little sister.

Christina is the former classmate of Rio but, they never had any chance to have a proper conversation like this in the past.

Though he doesn't know what kind of reaction she will show if she knows that she's currently having this kind of conversation with Rio, he's quite surprised to find this unexpected gentle side of her since the her of that time was sharp and taciturn.

"Nevertheless, Flora-sama also summoned a hero under her right. Rui Shigekura, Hiroaki Sakata, Satsuki Sumeragi. With this, three heroes are confirmed. Saint Stellar kingdom should have a holy stone too but....."

"Yes. Saint Stellar kingdom also summoned a hero. His name is Takahisa Sendou-sama"

Rio is telling Christina about the information regarding Takahisa.

"Could it be..... Saint Stellar kingdom hero is also attending the evening party? "

Christina's eyes opened wide as she she received a surprise in that news. Maybe she found that it's unusual for the closed kingdom like Saint Stellar kingdom to appear in the evening party.

"Yes. Galwark kingdom, Bertram kingdom anti-government organization[Restoration], and Saint Stellar kingdom. The three of them who summoned each of their hero decided to strengthen their relationship with that evening party"

"It seems that the world is experiencing a great transformation while I'm confined in the castle. In the current situation..... Especially the matter of the hero summoned under Flora isn't a good news for duke Albo still....."

Christina is showing a listless expression while saying those words.

"Both opposing party of[Restoration] and the current Bertram kingdom will keep increasing each of their influence from this point onward. Galwark kingdom also moving behind [Restoration]. Now I can understand why duke Albo is searching for your highness in frenzy"

When Rio is saying so, Celia who silently listened to their conversation suddenly started speaking.

"But then, there's another thing that I'm worrying about....."

"What could it be ? "

Christina is glancing at Celia.

"With this much people looking for you and your highnesses place, you should have arrested by them right ? "

Christina nodded in hearing Celia's question.

"Maybe. The one who secretly took us from the castle was the one who is suspected for rebellion, count Claire"

Christina said so with a gloomy expression.

"My dear father was the one who directed your highnesses escape ? "

"The one who devised the plan was my father. The one we can count amongst the royal faction right now is just count Claire, his job is to send me toward Flora's place. Though we managed to escape all the way to this place due to count Claire's cooperation, we were unable to move and locked in this basement in just a few days since our escape"

"..... Now I understand the various situation which led to this situation. In short, this basement is also a completely safe place right"

Celia is saying so with a grim expression.

"Though some of the search party are currently staying in this mansion is vaguely noticing the existence of this chamber of secret. It seems that the count also managed to fool them but, it's just a matter of time till they lose their patience and do a thorough investigation"

Christina heaved a deep sigh as she said so.

".....What shall we do, your highness ? Must we hide forever in this place ? "

"I'm also worried about what shall we do"

Keep hiding in this place while wishing to be never found, or try to escape from this place while knowing about the risk.

Though everything will be alright for the former as long as the situation developed as they wished, it's only if everything according to what they wish. They don't know how long the search for them will be, their escape route is sealed if the search party found them, it's game over for them.

On the other hand, though there's an extremely high chance that they'll be found during their initial escape, they'll have more freedom once they can escape from that. If they can travel incognito until their destination, it might be a wiser move rather than waiting idly in this place.

Either way, the one who should decide whether they will go or not after weighing between pros and cons is Christina.

"I see....."

Celia is nodding while showing a slightly troubled face. Rio is watching silently at her side profile.

"Come to think of it Celia-sensei, what did you do to your hair color ? I remember that your hair color was pure white"

Christina then asking that question as if she suddenly recalled about that.

"Ah, uhhm, this is....."

Celia sent a slightly perturbed look at Rio. When Rio is nodding at her, she finally felt relieved.

"I'm changing my hair color with a magic tool"

"May I ask the supply channel for this magic tool ? "

Though she already has a guess from their conversation, Christina asked that question to make sure.

"It was made by me. Your highness"

Rio is answering instead of Celia.

"Is the magic equation for changing hair color already widespread? Since I never saw one in Bertram kingdom for as long as I can remember"

Though there's many magic equations circulating in Strahl region, it doesn't mean that everything is available for general population.

Parts of them are hidden by certain groups or certain people, some even hidden from public eyes and never see the light of the day.

The magic which used this magic equation is treated as a secret art and never leaked outside so easily.

Therefore, the value is rising to unfathomable levels with time. During the 1000 years history of Strahl region, war between small kingdoms did happen over a secret art.

"Must be so, right. At least it's not made with magic equation that is circulating in general population. It must be what they call as a secret art"

"..... Though it might sound rude to you, but can you lend 4 similar magic tools to us? Naturally it won't be for free"

Christina stopped beating around the bush and went straight to the main point.

Magic tool to change their hair color—— It might be the most wanted item she wanted to have due to their runaway status.

Since Christina's light purple colored hair and the two Japanese black colored hair is quite rare even in Bertram kingdom, they're definitely standing out from the rest as long as they leave this place as it is.

The method to change hair color isn't limited to magic alone.

But, dyeing their hair with common paint can easily make a tinge on their hair and wig also unsuited for disguise since it stands out in one way or another,

On the other hand, the Celia in front of her looks so natural to the point that she almost mistook that hair color as her natural hair color. Even their pursuer

won't expect them to be able to change their hair color with such precision.

"That's right. It's not like I'm a stingy person if it's only lending the magic tool for limited-time, I'll lend you the magic tool as long as you agree to several conditions with magic contract"

Rio showed his agreement by presenting indefinite conditions.

He considered the matter of lending his magic tool to Christina as a negotiation card as a preparation for when the worst case happened in the future.

He still have some spare as emergency provisions when he made the one for Miharu-tachi, so it won't take any time.

Though he still has to explain the type of magic contract, it'll be omitted for the time being,

"Is that true ? "

Though she's worrying about the condition, Christina is smiling in hearing that offer.

"Yeah, let's leave the condition for later. Please return to the previous conversation since there's a few things that I want to hear"

The condition for lending the magic tool is for after they're done with the conversaiton—— So he thinks as he cut the previous conversation.

"In that case, May I start first. Celia-sensei——"

Christina is looking at Celia as she say so. Her next words is——,

"Will you come along with me to[Restoration] ? "

As expected, it was a direct invitation to Celia.

Maybe because she expected that, Celia doesn't seem to be perturbed by it. But, she's showing an extremely anxious face.

"..... May I think about it before giving my answer ? "

After a brief hesitation, Celia held back from replying immediately. Though not looking at him, it seems she is quite mindful about Rio who sits beside her.

On the other hand, Christina have an extremely refreshed expression.

"Naturally. Shall we stop today's discussion with this then. Count Claire should be descending to this basement around tomorrow morning. I don't mind even if you gave your answer after talking to count Claire"

"Thank you very much for the consideration"

Celia bowed to Christina.

Chapter 120: A Pressing Decision

After ending their conversation with Christina, Rio and Celia retired to an available room in the basement, facing each other on their beds. Celia had taken off her hair color-changing pendant, while Rio left his on.

"Hey, Rio. I..."

"You want to accompany Princess Christina, right?"

"Eh?"

She looked worried as she spoke—and reading her like an open book, Rio didn't even let her start.

"Ah, no. I'm worried about that, I mean..."

"It's your life, ma'am. Please, follow your heart so you can move forward with no regrets. That's why I took you out of the castle, after all."

"... Rio."

Celia chewed on her lips muttering his name. It had been a few months since she followed him, and her weary heart got the rest it needed so badly. Until then, she was effectively living under house arrest, with a forced marriage and little else on the horizon; but once she left, her world opened up wider than she thought it could.

Born and raised a noble, to continue living and abandoning her obligations was unthinkable, but... She found herself enjoying every day she spent with Rio.

"If I were to go with Lady Christina, you won't come with us, will you?"

Rio replied with an apologetic tone.

"Unfortunately, I have no intention of working for Beltram."

"Do you hate Beltram Kingdom?"

She asked timidly, as though she already knew the answer.

"I don't hate the kingdom. Rather, it's the blue bloods running it that give me my sense of aversion. Miss Celia excluded, of course."

"... I see. I'm sorry, to be asking something so strange."

"Don't worry about it."

A silence hung in the room for a few moments.

"Rio. I-Is there anything I could do for you?"

"That was pretty sudden. What's wrong?"

"I mean, all I've done is receive; I haven't done anything in return."

Celia looked down, remorseful, until Rio disagreed.

"That's not true at all. You've saved me more times than I can count back at the academy."

"I didn't really do anything special..."

"Of course you did."

"Eh?"

"To me, Miss Celia is someone special. You were the only one who showed kindness to a worthless orphan like me, and the time I spent with you was the only time I felt at ease. Can you truly say you haven't done anything for me?"

"Um, ah, no, that's... How would...?"

Unable to form a coherent sentence at Rio's frank confession, Celia looked away as she tried to speak. But the undeniable reddening of her cheeks was enough to get Rio to smile.

"You really haven't changed at all. Please never lose that gentle smile. If you can do that, there's nothing more I could ask for."

"Ah... Mm."

She nodded, but her voice was faint and weak.

"... Well, that's my selfish little wish, I suppose. I'd like it if you just kept it in the corner of your mind. Sorry if it seemed pushy."

Rio looked embarrassed when he said it, and Celia suddenly raised her voice in response.

"N-Not at all! Actually, I'm happy! I never knew you thought so highly of me—

I'll try my best to keep it that way!"

Celia sat straight, her hand on Rio's shoulder. Despite her shorter stature, the determined expression on her face made her seem taller than himself in his eyes. Celia swallowed, then spoke again.

"Y-You see! Rio!"

"Ah, yes?"

"Um, you know. I, me too. For me as well, Rio is, Rio is..."

She stuttered, trembling as Rio waited silently for what she wanted to say. But before she could get the words out of her mouth...

"Haruto."

The inorganic Aisia's voice suddenly echoed in the room. Rio and Celia bolted upright as she appeared by Rio's side like she'd been there the entire time.

"Aisia?"

"I need to talk. Do you have a moment?"

"Mm? Ah, yeah. Of course."

Aisia sat next to Rio as she usually did, but for some reason she looked like you couldn't pry her off him if you tried.

"Hey, Aisia..."

Rio felt a chill down his spine hearing Celia's icy tone, but Aisia only cutely cocked her head to one side.

"Mm?"

"Did you happen to hear what we were talking about just now?"

"I was listening."

"Gh... (I completely forgot about this girl!)"

There was absolutely no need whatsoever for her to appear at exactly that moment. Celia considered only two possibilities: either it was intentional, or Aisia was a genuine airhead who couldn't read the room.

I wonder, maybe she came out to help me? If I rode my own momentum any

further I would have said some really embarrassing things...

Amid her complicated feelings, Celia was hit by a sense of relief, and of shame. Cheeks slightly red, she took herself out of her thoughts and back to the matter at hand.

"A-Aisia, what is it you wanted to say? My father is going to be here tomorrow morning, so we should be getting to sleep soon."

Once she finished, they heard the sound of something shifting outside the room. It was similar to when they first entered the basement.

"Is the thing you want to tell me..."

"Mhm, something is coming down here."

Aisia nodded, confirming Rio's suspicions, and returned to her spirit form; the air in the room grew tense when she was gone. Rio slowly stood, grabbing his knife and silencing his footsteps as he crept toward the door.

They waited ten seconds, with no indication of any struggles outside—then they heard a knock.

"... It's Vanessa. Count Claire arrived early. He's waiting for everyone in the dining room now."

Rio eased up, having been ready for a fight, then turned and nodded to Celia.

"Thank you. We'll come immediately."



When Rio and Celia made it over, Vanessa and Christina were speaking with an unidentified man—evidently Celia's father, Laurent Claire. He had a somewhat slight build, but for a middle-aged man he was quite attractive, with a dignified air about him befitting his position. It seemed Christina was in the middle of explaining things.

"... Hm?"

Laurent looked confused for a moment when Celia entered the room, then descended into hysterics as the gears in his head started turning again.

"Ce... Celly?! What are you doing here?"

... Celly?

Rio took some time to process what he just heard, and Celia answered with a dry smile.

"Ahaha, please excuse me for my sudden absence, Father."

Laurent was already on his feet, arms wide open and moving to hug his daughter.

"H-Have you been well? A letter arrived with your handwriting after you disappeared, but I couldn't stop worrying."

"I'm terribly sorry. I had to withhold a lot of information from my letter... But as you can see, I'm quite alright."

It looked like he doted on Celia pretty heavily. It was a stark contrast from the noble aura his presentation gave off, but all in all Rio thought he wasn't a bad guy.

"Mmm... There is something I must speak with the princess about, but..."

"I'm sure it won't take long, so please talk with Miss Celia while you can. This reunion was a long time coming."

Laurent had trouble sorting his priorities—he had a lot of things he wanted to ask his daughter, after all—so the ever-perceptive Christina threw him a lifeline. He hesitated briefly, then made his choice.

"... No, what Your Highness needs to hear is more important right now."

"I understand. It doesn't appear to be good news, but please tell me."

"Right. It seems an additional search party has been sent from the royal capital; I expect they will carry a warrant signed by His Majesty. If so, I will have no choice but to show them the entire property, including this basement."

A sullen look crossed his face as he spoke. A search warrant was tantamount to a death knell for not only Christina, but her companions and House Claire as well. Although, nobody in the conversation seemed ready to give up so quickly.

"... When will they be here?"

"Though His Majesty may buy us some time, even that has its limits. The

fastest they should arrive should be tomorrow morning."

"If that's true, we need to leave right away."

Christina struggled to get the words out, knowing how tall of an order that was.

"Agreed. We would stand out if we leave during the day. And the number of personnel on the mansion's grounds is lower at night."

Laurent's reaction was much the same. Fewer soldiers or not, there was no option with a high chance of escape, so Christina turned to Rio as if she was ready to beg.

"... Sir Amakawa. The magic tools you use to change your hair color, may I ask that you're willing to lend them to us?"

"... It's possible. I have spares in the room. Would you give me a few moments to retrieve them?"

"Of course."

"Pardon me, then."

Without any delay, Rio left the dining room.

"Miss Celia, please tell Count Claire what's happened to you up to now. And I apologize for rushing you, but I would like to hear your reply regarding what I asked you about."

"... I understand."



"Hm... Talk about an outrageous story, but if it's coming from Celly I have no choice but to believe it."

Laurent was silent through the entire thing, only his bitter expression serving as a response during. When Celia was done, his eyes pointed to Rio, who had returned somewhere in the middle. He stood from his chair, walked up to Rio, placed his right hand over his chest and bowed.

"Sir Haruto Amakawa. As the one who saved my Celly, allow me to express my gratitude. You have my thanks."

He had to take a few seconds to clear away his discomfort. Rio was preparing himself to be abused.

"No, that is, rather, I had done something I couldn't take back. If anything, I should apologize for causing you such distress."

"Well, certainly, if my opponent wasn't Albou's son I would have reduced him to ash myself before any of this happened."

"Ah, haha..."

Rio's smile cramped a little hearing that remark get thrown around so casually. Laurent Claire was considered one of the greatest mages in Beltram Kingdom. While Rio would give him a run for his money, Laurent could easily leave most as nothing more than a pile of embers with a snap of his fingers.

Soon, Laurent returned to his seat, and Celia spoke up with a resolute glint in her eyes.

"... Father, I'm going to follow the princess."

"And even if I say you shouldn't go, you wouldn't listen, right?"

Laurent resigned to her decision. Matters would have been made that much worse if, after having been inexplicably gone so long, she'd suddenly appeared in the basement of her family's manor alongside Christina.

"Yes. Somewhere deep down after I left the castle, I was always anxious, wondering if that was okay. And in order to find the answer to that, I asked Haruto to bring me here. The situation we're in is unexpected, but I feel like I need to do this."

"I see..."

Leaving Laurent to sort through his thoughts, Celia then faced Christina.

"Lady Christina, you have my reply."

"Thank you very much. To be quite honest, having a mage of your caliber with us is a great boon. Should we survive this, I will see to it that you are properly rewarded."

As she spoke, the princess bowed deeply to Celia.

"I'm honored... Your Highness. May I speak with Haruto privately for a little while?"

"Of course."

Receiving permission to do so, Celia and Rio left for a quiet room.

"Lady Celia."

Celia couldn't help but laugh a bit at Rio's change in tone, but her expression immediately changed to a gloomy one.

"I'm sorry, Haruto. I made my decision without talking to you first. It probably looked like I was just using you for my convenience..."

"Not at all. I wanted to help you, and try to repay the years of kindness you've shown me."

Rio shook his head and responded with a smile.

"Thank you... If you say it yourself, I understand. So, I guess I have no choice but to rely on you forever, right? Even if it seems unfair, you're the only one I've ever been this comfortable with... But, Haruto, you've already done so much for me. Far beyond anything I have for you."

She smiled warmly, continuing.

"So please run away, Haruto. It's not too late. You should be able to get out just fine if you're on your own, right?"

Naturally, even with all the people searching for the princess and her entourage, escape would be a simple matter for Rio if he called on Aisia's aid. However, she knew he was reluctant to use his spirit arts in public; she also knew it was better to conceal them. So no matter how much she wanted him to save her again—she couldn't bring herself to ever say it.

"I could pretty easily. That said, do you honestly think I'd just leave you alone in this situation?"

Rio looked genuinely surprised that she would even suggest it.

"But you..."

Hate Beltram's nobles, don't you?

Celia choked down what she was about to say.

"I know. And maybe you're right."

Regardless of whether or not he wanted to help Celia, he held no such desire for Christina, nor any obligations toward her.

"Even so, that's not reason enough for me to just up and abandon you."

Before she knew it, tears were welling up in Celia's eyes. She wiped them away quickly, trying to hide how happy she was to hear those words from his mouth.

"That's why I want you run. Any more than this and I'd never be able to stop depending on you."

"Whether or not you get out of the mansion safely, will you be able to join up with Restoration so easily?"

After a brief pause, Celia nodded.

"That's a lie. It's impossible."

"That's not true at all, I can."

Celia pouted at him, but she couldn't honestly deny his evaluation.

"You've never killed anyone. The same goes for Princess Christina. It's probably the same for the kids with the black hair, too. Vanessa is the only one who's had the appropriate training and experience, meaning she's the only one capable of proper combat. And even then, the five of you together would stand out."

As expected, his analysis was spot-on.

"To reduce the risk to you all, you need a diversion, which means splitting the group. What do you plan to do?"

"I... I'll be the diversion."

"Out of the question. If you're caught, you'll only bring trouble into your house. Can you explain how you showed up here of all places out of nowhere?"

"Then... I just won't let them catch me."

"No, you'll get caught for sure."

"I won't be caught. Why are you so confident about this?"

She was getting irritated, and it showed.

"Because your reflexes are slow, and your running speed even slower."

"..."

It was incredibly embarrassing to even respond, as Rio stated those things as fact with a deadpan tone and gentle smile as if he was mocking her.

"S-So what! It's fine! I'll be just fine without you, Haruto! You should just hurry and go off somewhere else!"

Celia shouted angrily, like she was trying to get him to hate her for it.

"Sure, I'll go."

"..."

Suddenly, her face contorted in shock at his instant consent.

"Of course, I'll only go after I escort you to Restoration. I'll be in your care until then."

"I won't ask you to..."

"I'm aware. Even if you refuse, I'll just go make a racket on my own."

"... You idiot..."

Celia's shoulders drooped. Crestfallen and realizing that any further attempts at persuading him would be fruitless.

"So that's why, Your Highness, do you require my power?"

After the pair rejoined the rest of the party, Rio brought it up with Christina.

"I couldn't ask for more. As it is now, though, I have no suitable reward I can offer. Are you really okay with this?"

"A reward doesn't matter to me. Aside from the matter of lending the items you need, I'd like to ask that you agree to a few conditions under a magic contract."

"I understand. Then, after we come up with a plan, let's make the contract. Judging by what you said, am I to assume you can safely get us out of the city?"

Squinting, Christina asked him about his idea with an expectant voice.

"That's right. I'll worry about diverting the soldiers. I'll pull their attention to make a gap in their search, so please use that time to leave the mansion."

Everyone besides Celia gasped. Laurent, listening silently so far, spoke up.

"Frankly speaking... This is no different from making yourself a sacrifice. I can't allow this. There are soldiers and knights all well-trained in combat against other humans, and if they don't simply kill you they'll torture you to death. Can you really pull this off?"

"I can. However, I ask that you acknowledge the chance of there being victims in the uproar, and the city being effectively paralyzed for some time."

"... How confident. Alright then. I can overlook some property damage, but if at all possible, please spare the civilians as best you can. Other than that, feel free to go wild."

Laurent finished with a delighted grin, granting Rio his express permission to go on a rampage. Next was drawing up their strategy.

"Thank you very much. So, I suppose first would be..."



Shortly before the plan was due to commence, having changed his clothes to something black and donning a matching robe, Laurent called out to Rio.

"Sir Amakawa... No, Haruto."

"What is it?"

Rio stood at attention once he saw Laurent bow to him.

"I want to ask this of you as a man. Please... Protect Celia. I beg you."

"That goes without saying."

A light pause kept Rio from answering immediately, but he recovered and did so with a smile. Of course, there was no need to ask, but he was somewhat glad to know Celia's father was counting on him.

"... I see. In that case, please take this with you."

Standing straight again, Laurent handed Rio a small filled bag.

"This is?"

"Traveling expenses. You may have a need for money one way or another, no? Please take the remainder as your reward as well. I don't know if it's enough however, so we shall arrange the rest if fate allows us to meet again."

"No, this... I can't accept this."

"Please do. At the very least, let me shoulder the costs of travel."

At his insistence, Laurent was practically shoving it onto him.

"... I'll give the remainder to Lady Celia, I suppose."

"Hm, you're quite stubborn. A promising one for your age. I would love the chance to chat with you over a drink, but it's about that time. Farewell."

"Right. Excuse me, then... I'm off."

Leaving his parting words behind, Rio climbed the stairs to the mansion's garden. He cracked open the door in the ceiling to scan the area. Confirming a gap in the soldiers' formation, he threw the door open and leapt out; then without missing a beat, he slipped by the search squad, using the trees in the garden to clear the tall fence leading to the rest of the city.

"It seems his skill is genuine. He's a kind young man as well. But I won't forgive him if he makes my Celly cry."

Laurent closed the secret entrance, muttering to himself while he returned to the basement. Shortly after, a ball of light loudly exploded over the middle of the city. Not even a few minutes had passed.

Chapter 121: Escape From Creia

The place is around the gate of the mansion of count Claire which is located in the center of the city.

The sphere of light that had risen on top of the city made the entire city experience daylight at night.

Soon enough it's being followed by the commotion made by the soldiers that is staying in the mansion.

"Oi, what happened. It's so bright outside, has the sun already risen? "

"I don't know! That sphere of light just suddenly appeared on top of the city"

An old soldier who is taking a light nap inside the station right beside the gate appeared in hearing the commotion.

Though he have heard what just happen, he's not expecting to hear a reply that will make him understand the situation.

And there, he saw a figure approaching the gate.

"Who's that ? "

The soldier who noticed the figure of a person asked in loud voice.

"..... Woman? "

There, they saw a young girl whose entire body is hidden by robe. Her face is fully exposed since it's not covered by the hood of the robe.

Her light purple colored hair sparkling brightly under the lumination of the sphere of light that is shining above the city.

"That, hair color....."

"D-D-D-Doesn't she have the same features as the ojou-sama in the notification?. They tell us to protect her if we were to find the girl with light purple colored hair"

Those soldiers were fascinated by the fairy-like beauty of the girl and were just standing in a daze at their place.

And then, the girl suddenly turned around while those soldiers were scrambling around in confusion.

Almost at the same time, the bright sphere of light above the city is rapidly being extinguished. The darkness of the night descending upon the city for the second time.

"W-WAIT! AH, I MEAN, PLEASE WAIT A MINUTE!! "

Despite the soldier calling her to stop, the girl isn't waiting for them. She vanished like a smoke inside the darkness.

"C-CALL THE SOLDIERS IN THE MANSION RIGHT NOW! WE WILL CHASE AFTER HER!!! "

"Y-YES! "

After the old soldier suddenly issued such a order, the younger soldiers immediately run into the mansion with breakneck speed.

As for the light-purple haired girl who they're looking around, she was looking at their exchange from above.

(Aisia. Lure the soldiers inside the mansion. Please make sure they see you around the vicinity of the mansion, and then lure them from the mansion toward the north block of the city)

The girl—— Aisia, heard Rio's voice resounding in her head. Her hair color changed to light-purple with spirit arts.

(Understood)

After replying to Rio with her inorganic voice, Aisia descended on the ground for the second time.

☆☆☆☆☆☆

Rio strengthening his body and then running atop the roof of the building that is lining in rows—— Toward the north block.

"HURRY! SHE WON'T BE ABLE TO MOVE THAT FAR YET. SHE MIGHT BE TRYING TO ESCAPE FROM THE NORTH GATE. SEARCH THE VICINITY THOROUGHLY! "

Despite the night time, numerous soldiers were scattering around the streets.

Being lured by Aisia, the soldiers inside the rampart were lured till the north block.

After finding out that the soldiers were moving in two-man team, Rio leaped toward them like a bird of prey.

He's hiding the sound of his steps with wind spirit arts. After quietly landing on the ground, he had driven a blow even before the soldier noticed him.

"GUA"

"GA!"

The soldier fainted the next moment and then collapsed on the ground. The iron baton which became the soldiers must have equipment is rolling nearby.

Rio grabbed the iron baton with his right hand after noticing that it is rolling nearby.

He then swung it around to get used to the feeling. After getting accustomed to the baton, he concealed himself by jumping toward the roof for the second time.

After that, he can hear various small commotions coming from many directions from the soldiers who is moving as a small team and heading toward the north block——

(Haruto)

After hiding his figure near the north gate, Aisia's figure materialized before him.

"Thank you for your hard work. I want you to make yourself appear to be escaping from this gate after I'm opening this gate. This will be your last job for this operation, Aisia"

Rio is saying so while looking at the gate which is illuminated with watch-fire from his hiding place. And sure enough, there's many more soldiers than usual since they're being very careful to not let anyone escape.

"Okay"

After nodding at him, Rio put on the hood of his robe enough to hide his facial expression.

The next moment, Rio dashed toward the north gate without showing any hesitation.

His boots which are made of the leather of dragon sub-species is stamping on the ground, as he pushed himself forward toward the gatekeepers like a bullet. After getting into an inch distance from the gatekeeper, he swung the baton without giving any chance for the soldiers to notice anything.

"GUH"

3 of the 5 gatekeepers fell with that blow.

"HA, EH,..... AAAAH? "

By the time the remaining 2 soldiers noticed Rio, it's already too late. As soon as they saw his figure, they feel a blow from their back and then they're already unconscious in the next moment.

(The equipment to open the gate is inside the station)

In order to open the gate of the mansion, Rio is entering the station that become one right by the side of the gate.

Though he found an old soldier inside, he promptly made him faint and then proceeded to tinker with the mechanic to open the gate.

Then there's a loud sound of the gate started to open.

The soldiers in the vicinity become noisy once they hear the sound of gate being opened.

"OI SOMEONE OPENED THE GATE! "

"THE GATE IS OPEN. I SEE A GIRL BELOW THE GATE! "

When the north gate is opened enough for one person to enter, Rio sent a telepathic communication to Aisia.

(It's your turn, Aisia. Please merge with me when you find the right moment)

(Understood)

Aisia is dashing following after Rio's signal. Rio is leaving the station and heading toward the southern block before even losing the sight of Aisia who is leaving from the north gate.



10 minutes after Rio and Aisia is commencing their operation.

Celia-tachi is climbing over the wall of the mansion of count Claire and safely escaped from the mansion area.

"It seems the diversion work very well. To think that we can leave the mansion so easily....."

Christina is scanning the surroundings in admiration while putting on the hood of her robe.

Whether it is the garden of the mansion or the vicinities, it's virtually almost empty and can't even be compared to a few minutes ago.

Thanks to that even Christina-tachi who is basically a noob in spying can easily escape from the mansion.

Seeing that they can easily sneak out of the mansion, the degree of damage they'll cause to count Claire's house will vastly decrease even if they were captured later by coincidence.

And since they already changed their hair color with magic tools, it'll greatly diminish the chance of them being discovered in case the soldiers question them in the city.

Though Christina has only half-expectation on the plan that is suddenly raised by Rio, her hope burst up more than her expectation.

"Haruto will definitely do this kind of work. Let's go to the south gate"

"..... You sure have faith in his ability don't you"

Christina was looking curiously at Celia who put her trust in Rio.

"Because there's no reason for him to can't do such things"

Celia is smiling awkwardly and yet have a apologetic expression on her face.

To be exact she become even more confident due to Rio and Aisia's

cooperation but Christina-tachi has no way of knowing about Aisia.

"I see..... Then, let's be on our way so that we won't let the opportunity created by him slip by"

Though she is worrying about many things, it can't be helped since they have no leeway for such thought.

If the soldiers who are concentrating in the northern block return after some time has elapsed, the defense of the city might be increased.

Though the gate is already open in the morning in normal situations, with such a situation that just happened, it's easy to understand if the soldiers severely limit the traffic of the gate since morning.

Naturally it doesn't mean that there's no option in waiting in the rampart of Creia till the situation cooled down but the search personnel will drastically increase after this.

Now with the possibilities that Christina is escaping from the city from the north gate, they might have to consider that the search party will reach outside of the city.

Solidifying the vigilance of the surrounding area while hiding in the capital territory at carefree just forestalls the method.

Therefore they can escape from the city as long as they aren't found out by their opponent in the current situation.

So Christina-tachi decided to hasten their pace.

Thus, a few minutes after their escape.

Since most of the soldiers inside of the rampart is currently mobilized toward the northern block, they at most can't find any soldier in southern block.

On the other hand, there's many civilians since the pleasure block is located in the southern block too.

In addition, it's more noisy than usual due to the sphere of light that exploded a few minutes ago but then, Christina-tachi who have no knowledge of the normal situation of this block didn't know about such things.

They were not in a hurry to go to the south gate but walking at reasonable pace and then, their movement ceased.

"As expected, the gatekeeper is there. Next is what shall we do to escape from this gate....."

Vanessa who hides behind the cover is glaring at the southern gate with a sullen look.

The height of the rampart which surrounding the city easily surpassed dozens of metres—— Not a height which one can easily jumped over them with hyper physical ability magic.

They have no choice but to open the gate if they want to leave the city.

Fortunately it's thanks to the diversion in the northern side, the defense of the south gate is severely lacking.

And then Vanessa noticed that they can easily leave the gate.

"Too slow"

"..... !

Suddenly they heard a voice from behind.

Christina-tachi is trembled due to surprise. When they turned around to see the owner of that voice, Rio was standing there with a black robe wrapping around his body.

"Geez, that surprised me. That's splendid footwork isn't it. Even Vanessa failed to notice it"

Christina said so in admiration. Thereupon, Vanessa showed a slightly vexed expression.

"It seems you're extremely surprised by that. My deepest apology for such a action"

Rio is apologizing awkwardly with a wry smile on his face.

"Don't worry, it's reassuring instead. Though I'm sorry for asking this when you just came, do you have any method to pass that gate? "

"Let's break from the front gate. Since I made a mess of the northern gate,

this gate should be left almost empty"

Christina was blinking in surprise in hearing such a simple answer from Rio.

"It seems you really caused a commotion at the northern gate didn't you"

"I should have said it before during our strategic meeting right? Because distributing of their combat potential by making a mess of several gates is a necessary condition"

"It's certainly as you say but, it didn't mean that the concrete method is taught right?"

Christina is showing a slightly surprised face in hearing Rio say so with a wry smile on his face.

The current Christina has no power unless she reaches [Restoration]. That is something that even her pursuer knows very well about.

And then, the shortest route they have to take from the capital of Creia to [Restoration] is by using the highway which is heading toward the northeast.

As long as the fact that she left from north gate remained, Christina's pursuers won't doubt that she escaped to north.

Naturally, they might be heading toward any one of four directions if they take a detour after leaving from the north gate but, that will also be suspected as a diversion.

"Since we have no leeway for me to explain the situation. Let's open the gate immediately"

After saying those words in a tone as if he is simply go for a walk, Rio went toward the south gate.

"Eh..... Eh....."

"Haruto will be okay"

Christina missed her chance to stop him due to Rio's extremely lofty behavior. She decided to quietly watch the situation after Celia convinced her.

"Oi, stop right there! No one is allowed to pass the gate at night. Take your hood off and show me your face"

One of the two gatekeeper's who noticed Rio is calling to him.

"I have to go outside no matter what. Can you let me to pass? "

"No. Night traffic is banned by command of the territory! "

Though Rio looked like he is trying to negotiate with them, when his distance became closer to them, he closed the distance between him and the gatekeeper in an instant and nailed a knee strike to the abdomen of one of the gatekeepers.

The body of the gatekeeper who received his knee strike is sent to the air and then fell onto the ground like a sack of potatoes.

The other gatekeeper was looking at that scene with a dumbfounded face.

"WHA..... B-BAST-.....GEH! "

Rio already an inch away from the bosom of the gatekeeper the moment the gatekeeper tried to say something. The gatekeeper is blown away after a hit from his elbow landed on the gatekeeper chest.

He continued to enter the guardroom without confirming whether there's any soldier left or not inside, and it turned out that he didn't find anyone inside. Maybe the stationed soldier also rushed toward the north block.

After confirming that fact, Rio is coming out from the guardroom and then signaled to Christina-tachi to come.

"I'll open the gate. Please make use of this timing to strengthen your physical ability with magic tool or magic"

"Understood"

Christina-tachi is nodding at him with a tensed expression when Rio reminded them about their plan.

"You two, take this sword. When the situation turned for the worse, please protect yourself with that sword"

Rio picked up the sword from the sword belt of the gatekeeper and gave them to the two black haired youths.

"Y-Yea "

Though the two of them kept their silence so far with a strained expression on their face, it became even more strained after they received those swords.

"Well then, I'll open the gate"

"Please"

Rio is entering the guardroom for the second time and tinkering with the necessary mechanism to open the gate. Thereupon, the loud reverberating sound is resounding in the surrounding.

"THE GATE IS OPEN! "

"WHY IS THE GATEKEEPER BELOW OPENING THE GATE? "

The gatekeeper who is currently on watching duty on top of the rampart is making a ruckus when they noticed that the gate is open.

"NOW! "

Christina-tachi went at full speed after hearing Rio's signal. Rio also followed after them from behind, the footsteps of the six of them is reverberating in the downtown in the middle of the night.

They might be strengthening their physical ability but it doesn't mean that they can slow down since they only gained trifling distance from their pursuer.

Thus they keep running with everything they got till the scenery of the city ceased.

It seems that their timing is just too poor since it's just before the sunrise. The eastern sky started to become brighter.

The most perilous place is the wheat field that spreading far and wide in the surrounding of the city. The current season is just before sowing the seeds so there's almost no hiding place on the field.

After arriving in this area, it seems that except for Rio and Vanessa who trained their body, everyone is already panting heavily.

Rio judged that he might need to gain more time for them—— If possible.

"I'll stop the incoming pursuer. You guys take the south highway and let's meet at first post town around this time tomorrow. There should be a spring

slightly away of the highway before that post town"

Rio suddenly said so after arriving at the middle of the wheat field.

"In that case, let me to help you too! "

Vanessa is offering her cooperation without moment of delay. Nevertheless, the other four already dead tired from all of that sprint to the point that the can't even speak. Nevertheless, it seems that Christina still have some room to speak.

"You have to take the baton of command during this escape as their escort. The advance party of our pursuer should be composed of fast runners. I'll leave immediately after disturbing their formation"

"..... KUH, understood"

Though Vanessa was at a loss, she still nodded at him.

"Well then, godspeed! "

After saying so, Rio stopped his legs and then turned around. He is taking out throwing knives and disposable daggers from his robe with both of his hands.

"Ha-Haruto..... You absolutely must come to the meeting place you know! Haa~haa~..... Please promise me! If you aren't coming, haa~, I will....."

He heard Celia's voice from behind. She's shouting frantically while trying to catch up with her breath. Though it's still dark outside, he could see that she is almost crying when saying so.

Rio is waving at her with his right hand and then returned to the city without waiting for her reply.

After that, Christina-tachi entered the forest which stretched along the highway when Rio turned around and headed toward their pursuer.



The number of people who chased after Christina-tachi was ten.

According to Rio's expectation, they were the advance party which were sent toward the south direction, all of them is wearing knight attire.

Whether it's because they're strengthening their physical ability with magic or magic tools, they're clearly running as fast as they can to the limit of their body.

(As expected, the spare force is left behind huh. But then, knight squad are.....)

Naturally due to difference in the physical ability between a normal human who never received regular training and soldier who train their body on daily basis, they might be able to catch up to Celia-tachi in no time.

Rio felt that trying to stop them was the correct choice.

"STOP ! "

Those soldiers were stopping at once when Rio who standing magnificently on their way is calling for a stop.

"..... YOU BASTARD, WHO THE HELL ARE YOU? WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN THIS KIND OF PLACE? TAKE OFF YOUR HOOD"

The one standing in the front who was seemingly their captain was saying so to Rio with a sharp tone.

"I'm waiting for you guys. There's something that I'm slightly curious about"

Rio said suggestive words as if he had somekind of intention without answering the captain's question.

"What ? "

Is his goal to stop us? —Thought the captain of those knight is looking at the back of Rio with a curious look, he couldn't see any figure of a person along the huge wheat field and forest.

"..... Well so be it. We have no time for idle chatter in this kind of place. Teach him a good lesson without killing him. You better spill the truth immediately"

"I'm going to ask some questions too but, I think I just need one person. You alone are plenty enough"

Rio is replying so as he pointed the dagger in his right hand toward the captain while making a sadistic smile on his lips.

Thereupon, wrinkles appeared on the forehead of the captain.

"..... DO IT"

And sent a signal for battle with a bone chilling voice. The knight behind him is moving at once.

Rio is kicking the ground as he sprinted toward those knights with a low stance. He's flinging the throwing knife on his left hand while speeding toward them at breakneck speed.

Thereupon, maybe because their reaction is delayed by the dim light, his throwing knife is pierced into the nape of the neck of the front most knight.

"GUH....."

The balance of the knight who got pierced by the knife is destroyed. But, it's not causing any disruption in the movement of the other knights.

As expected of one who is trained in combat—— Rio who calmly analyzing the situation unsheathed the other dagger hidden on his waist and grasped them with backhand grip.

Now he holds one dagger in each of his hand. Or what they call as dual wield. The reason why he isn't using his sword against them is because he doesn't want his identity to be known by those knights.

"SURROUND HIM! "

The knights are using the best method of victory by surrounding Rio. But, Rio is accelerating even further and already nearing the knight even before they are spreading to surround him.

"Na~~....."

As expected, even the knights trembled before such terrifying speed.

He is basically as fast as lightning. Rio is weaving between the gaps of the knights while making a sharp jump with dance-like movements which are as smooth as flowing water.

Not even a chance to surround him. And he keeps delivering a certain hit damage to the knights limbs each time he passed by one of them.

Though the knights also try to attack him with their sword, their sword can't even catch Rio's shadow.

"GOD DAMN IT, WHO THE HELL IS THIS GUY! "

"T-TOO STRONG! "

The knights were agitated after being toyed around by Rio who is moving around with acrobatic-like movement within the dim lighting.

But then, someone will certainly fall after being cut with the dagger once Rio passed that person, another one blown away after receiving his kick, at last only half of them remained.

After that, as soon as both side glared at each other, Rio is jumping to the side without giving them any leeway.

"W-What's the matter "

The moment they see Rio's vanished-like movement, the knights reaction is delayed.

The next moment, Rio who should have vanished appeared right next to him. And then he slipped through the gap between two knights and then hitting each of those two knight's weak point at their throat with his hands from above in the middle of air.

"STOP PLAYING AROUND! "

A knight swung his sword from behind Rio aiming for the moment when his feet landed on the ground.

But, Rio twisted his body to avoid that slash. Then slashing at his opponent with his dagger while turning around in the air.

Only 3 knights left. One of them is the knight captain who is watching the battle from afar and the other two is his underlings.

"O-OI ! BEAT THAT GUY RIGHT NOW! "

The knight captain shouted with a flustered voice.

Though the content of his order changed from "Teach him a good lesson" to "Beat him", it's a sound judgement seeing that a proud knight squad are

brought on the verge of annihilation by a single and lightly equipped infantry.

But, whether the remaining two knights can win against Rio or not is a completely different matter.

"Tsh..... HAAAAAAAAAAAA! "

One of the knights moved according to the captain's order slashed at Rio while raising a loud cry.

Rio is swinging the dagger in his left hand which he held with backhand grip to disarm the knight of his sword using his brute power which was strengthened with spirit arts.

The knight who felt that he just slashed an iron wall is showing a pained face due to the pain and numb feeling in his hand.

Rio is approaching the petrified knight. He casually swung his dagger from below to above and crushing his opponent's jaw with the pommel of the dagger.

"AH....."

As soon as that knight raised a mute scream, the last remaining knight already swung his sword to Rio's flank.

Rio dodged that slash by squatting. He countered by swinging his dagger horizontally and then the feeling of the edge of the dagger cutting through the knight's thigh transmitted to his hand.

And then followed by a knee strike to that knight's face when his knees fell on the ground.

The knight captain is looking at that scene with a dumbfounded face but,

"..... A-A-A-A-ARE YOU KIDDING ME! YOU BASTARD, STAND UP NOW! WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR! ? "

He is ranting with a hysteric voice because he might have a hard time to accept the fact that his squad was literally annihilated.

"U-UUUH....."

Though all of them are supposed to be dead, it seems some of them barely

kept their life.

They're moaning in pain while holding the injured parts on their body.

It's not a beautiful scene at all. Rio is frowning as he grit his teeth. But his frown vanished in the next moment as he looked at the knight captain.

"Kuh" "

Naturally the knight captain headed towards the opposite direction, he ran towards the city. He is probably a coward for doing that to all of his comrades without even slight hesitation.

Rio then threw the dagger in his right hand toward that knight captain.

"GUH"

The dagger pierced into the knight captain's right leg. Just like that he lost his balance and falling down in a unsightly manner.

Rio is readjusting the depth of his hood and then walking calmly toward the knight captain.

"W-WAIT! P-PLEASE SPARE MY LIFE! IF YOU WANT A RANSOM, I'M WILLING TO GIVE YOU AS MUCH AS YOU WANT! I'M SOMEONE FROM ALBO HOUSE AFTER ALL! "

The knight captain is frantically begging for his life. He is showing an extremely sorry state unbecoming of a prideful knight.

"..... Someone from Albo house you say? "

Rio half-doubted that fact when his opponent is proclaiming as someone of a bigshot house.

"T-That's right! I'm the second son of Charles Albo! "

The self-proclaimed son of Charles Albo saying so with smug on his face.

Speaking of Charles Albo, he was the man who tried to make Celia as his 7th wife.

(This man was the fiancée of Celia-sensei? Well whatever)

He has no leeway to confirm the truth from this person in the current

situation. Rio decided to end his job as soon as possible.

He'll let this man who have some kind of status to know some false information about Christina.

"In that case, answer my question. Why are you going as far as mobilizing the army of the kingdom? "

Rio is asking at him while pointing his dagger. Thereupon, the man showed a confused expression.

"W-What are you talking about? W-We were looking for the kidnapped princess Christina. Are you the bastard working along with the culprit? "

"Kidnapped princess? I don't know about that but..... I see, so that's the case huh"

After showing an expression as if this is the first time he heard about this news, Rio then showed an expression as if he understands the situation.

"W-What do you mean? And who are you? Where is princess Christina and Vanessa Emal? "

Maybe because he's just a small fry or maybe because he is a bigshot himself, Rio is admiring the captain for being able to ask such a question so suddenly in his situation.

"Well. I'm unrelated to this matter anyway. I've an even more important question. Do you know about the man called Lucius? "

Unpeturbed by it, Rio is trying to ask the information which he investigated lately.

Though he asked Celia some time ago whether she knew about the man called Lucius or not, she knew nothing regarding Lucius.

"L-Lucius? A-Are you referring to the heir of L'orgueil fallen house? "

Charles was startled and then asking at Rio with timid voice.

"L'orgueil house. I don't know about such old family name but, I heard that he was a master of swordsmanship to the point of almost becoming [King of Sword]. Are they the same person? "

"Then there's no doubt about it, he is the one you're looking for! "

Charles is nodding at Rio's inquiry.

"Do you know about his recent activity? "

"W-Why are you asking about such a question? "

"Just answer my question. Don't you dare to ask back"

"I-I don't know! I heard he became a mercenary and the last time he seen was more than decade ago. Why are you suddenly asking for his inf-..... C-COULD IT BE, YOU'RE WORKING FOR THAT MAN? Could it be that he is resenting us for ruining his house? "

"..... Who knows"

Rio just coldly dodged answering Charles who asked with a slightly confused look.

It seems Charles's house did something extremely unforgiveable to Lucius's house in the past.

Though it made him want to ask Charles who knows about Lucius's past, unfortunately his time is up.

(..... This should be enough right)

After judging so, Rio poured more power to his left hand which gripped the dagger.

"My bad then, you've served your purpose"

"W-WAIT! ARE YOU KIDDING ME, THIS IS DIFFERENT FROM WHAT YOU TOLD ME BEFORE! I ANSWERED YOUR QUESTION"

"Ah, it seems I told you that"

Rio is showing an evil smile to Charles who desperately objected his decision.

Rio has no obligation to keep his promise since It's not like Rio made a promise to spare his life if he answered Rio's question.

But, since it's part of the scenario, he has to do his job.

When Rio is casually rising his left hand which held the dagger,

"Hyiii! "

Charles closed his eyes while letting out a miserable scream.

Thereupon Rio foot is moving quickly to circling to Charles back. He is grasping on Charles cranium and sent a shock while pouring magical power inside.

"KUAAAA"

Charles fainted by the next moment.

Rio took out the dagger which pierced Charles's thigh. And gave him emergency treatment to prevent him from dying due to blood loss.

Though all of them already unconscious, it was easy for him to close the wounds of the knights who managed to survive by using his spirit arts.

But then, in the end he just made it look like he is going all out when attacking them, so it's nothing more than emergency treatment to close their wounds.

Whether the rest of the knights, save for Charles who only suffered from minor wounds can be saved or not is depending entirely on how long it will take for their reinforcements to come.

"Why are you sparing their life? "

Suddenly Aisia is standing behind him while asking that question

"I don't know"

Rio is replying with a self-mocking tone without turning around to see her.

Aisia isn't asking anymore questions and just silently helped him to heal the knights.

And then, Rio is heaving a sigh after the two of them finished their work in healing them.

"Shall we go then. Let's move out from this place"

"Okay"

In the next moment, the two of them is kicking the ground and leave that place.

"Let's do our future planning, Aisia"

Rio said those words after running in their invisible state for a while inside of the forest.

"Uhn"

Nodding at him, Aisia ceased to move and then grasped his hand.

"What's the matter? "

Rio asked Aisia with a shocked face.

Aisia just shook her head. She isn't replying to his question with words. She just grasped Rio hand.

"I see....."

Rio also timidly grasped her hand.

Her hand feels nice and warm. He felt that his frozen heart was slowly warmed with the warm feeling that transmitted from her hand.

"We can still overtake Celia-tachi right now you see? "

What will you do? —Aisia's looking into Rio's eyes.

"..... It's nothing, I'm just preparing several people's worth of tools for the journey. I mean it's a must have for journey by foot right. Can I leave sensei's safety to you? "

"Okay"

Rio is explaining his future plan and then Aisia nodded at him.

"Well then——"

Rio is reluctantly releasing Aisia's hand.

"——I'll take different action from this point"

And then told her so.

"Uhn"

After confirming that Aisia agreed to his plan, Rio lightly kicked the ground. His body is wrapped in wind and then soaring high in the sky in the next moment. Aisia also took a flight like Rio toward the different direction from him.

Their figure soon disappeared beyond the horizon of blue sky before the dawn.

Chapter 122 : Interlude *Part 3*

The morning of the day when Christina-tachi escaped from Creia.

Charles Albo was awakened in the guest room in the mansion of earl Claire.

Though he have vague memories about it, after receiving the explanation of the situation when he still fainting did he finally remembered what happened.

Hereafter, he decided to continue the pursuit by filing with the command unit in the room which become the headquarter for searching operation.

Though he don't dare to tell the truth, Charles mood is hit the rock bottom right now. Though he is a highborn noble who in even higher standing than the noble in this place, he was scared of someone of unknow origin—— It's an extremely humiliating experience which he can't forget no matter what.

Therefore it there's a possibilities of gaining the information about the origin of the one who threatening him right now, he'll take the catharsis to tearing that person to pieces.

But, the current him have an even more important duty to looking for Christina. But, Charles Albo isn't such a foolish person who will abandoning his duty in fit of rage.

That's why Charles is forcibly surpressing his own feeling and decided to looking for Christina first.

He start with proceeding to analyzing the gathered information.

He is taking into account every single possibilities and strong evidence which will become the escape route of Christina.

Moreover,due to great difference in the personnel damage which happened in north block and south block or maybe due to the fact that Charles himself meet Rio in person, he considered the possibilities that what happened in north block and south block is a completely different matter.

After deciding his goal from that point, he proceeding to separating the searching team in accordance to the degree of priority and the most effective

method to use his limited personnel.

While he considered such plan—— The door of the headquarters of the searching team where Charles staying at is knocked from the outside.

"Enter"

Charles is saying so from inside of the room.

Thereupon, a security soldier went into the room. He is bowing to Charles and then stating his business.

"Charles-sama. The leader of kingdom royal guard, Alfred Emal is coming. May I let him to enter? "

"Let him to enter. Fool. Call him right now"

Charles is frowning with displeased face as he urging the soldier.

"HA ! "

The soldier is turning around immediately and then invited Alfred who waiting outside of the room to enter.

Thereupon, a handsome man with quite burly body in the prime of his life is entering the room.

He is the man who recognised as the best swordsman in Bertram kingdom and the current [King of Sword] also the older brother of Vanessa Emal—— Alfred Emal.

Alfred is wearing blue colored light armor and helmet on top of his splendour knight attire, a sword with beautiful gem inserted on it's handle strapped on his waist.

"My apologize. I hope I wasn't too late"

Alfred said his apology as soon as he entered the room. Nevertheless, his cool expression doesn't seems to say so.

"Yeah. We meet a huge trouble here while you're taking your time on the way here"

"I see, it seems that way to me. I want to hear what was happened in detail"

Though Charles was saying those words as a sarcasm, Alfred just nonchalantly ignoring him and then urging for more explanation.

Thereupon, Charles is frowning lightly. But, now is not the time to fussing over such petty matter.

"I'll give a brief explanation since we're in emergency situation. A girl who look like your highness princess Christina appeared near the gate of the mansion of earl Claire. After that, there was strong evidence of some people escaping from south gate and north gate"

"In short, there's a possibilities that your highness princess Christina is escaped by using wither one of those gate right? "

"..... Yeah. A girl with light purple colored hair is appeared from north gate"

"I see. Naturally, you continue the searching operation right? "

"Naturally. Though I don't think they'll be so anive to use the highway route right after escaping since the vanguard of airnorne team already make a blockade at the north, south and east direction"

Charles is saying so as he pointing at the blockade points which marked on the map that spread on top of the desk.

"Aren't they won't easily being found out if they're escaping inside the forest? "

"I know. But, they're merely woman and children who unused to long traveling. They won't be able to go that far. I'm already forming several searching teams to sweeping throung the forest which expanding from north to south"

"..... You're only blocking the highway at the southern direction? "

"For now. Even if I want to deal with it, I'm limited with the number of personnel right now. So I'm abandoning the possibilities of them hiding outside of the rampart. I have to leave some of the personel behind in the city right. That's why I'm focusing my search on the north and east considering the destination of princess Christina"

"Fumu....."

Alfred showed a slightly troubled face in hearing Charles explanation.

Certainly, when speaking of her going toward Restoration which located in the northeast of the earl Claire territory, the shortest route to take is north or east.

But, though it'll take considerable distance sue to the detour, it doesn't mean that she won't take a detour via south route.

"Even if we were in lacking personel for the south route, I don't think it's a good idea though....."

"I know. I'll search that area if we have even a bit more of personel in my hand. In the first place..... The one who forced his way through the south gate might be an entirely different case from princess Christina escape"

Charles said the second line with annoyed expression as if it's just an addition.

"Why can you tell that? "

"..... The personel damage in north and south gate is done in completely different way. Though I consider the possibilities of them escaping from there since no one killed in action in the north gate, I can't bring myself to think like that with the south gate. Thanks to that several knight are killed in action"

"What ? Who killed them, a man or a woman? "

COuld it be that Vanessa is the one who killed them? ——Alfred can't bring himself to believe that story.

Though separated by quite far age, he know very well about Vanessa personality as her brother.

The knights of Bertram kingdom is similiar to valuable property of royalty.

Therefore, though Vanessa high loyalty as the member of royalty faction, he didn't think that she will easily ended the life of her comrade.

"..... It's a man. An unknown man. He easily defeated one squad of knight lead by me"

Though Alfred was relieved in hearing Charles explanation, now another

question surfaced in his mind.

"he singlehandedly defeated an entire squad of knight? We should be able to single out the culprit only to the person who have that much of a skill. He isn't the knight of our kingdom who cooperating with her highness right? "

"Knight? A knight? As if such savage combat style is that of a knight! He's fighting like a rogue! I know no one amongst the knight of our kingdom with that kind of combat style! "

Charles is spitting his irritation.

Using dagger instead of sword, even using dirty method—— Is extremely far apart from the extremely orthodox swordsmanship used by the knight of Bertram kingdom.

But having defeated by someone who use such savage way of fighting might be the greatest humiliation for Charles as a knight.

"But, I don't think that combat trained knight will be done in so easily by such thug"

Alfred is stating his doubt.

"I know. That's why I said unknown person. Though we can't cast aside the possibility that princess Christina is cooperating with earl Claire, I don't think there'll be an inkling in that two case"

I did picking up capable person by inquiring the adventurer guild in this city but, I couldn't find the record about such person.

"In the end, earl Claire is just a suspect for the matter of kidnapping royalty. The matter of scolding with crosscheck is a bit indiscreet. Or else how could we get an undeniable proof to checkmate him? "

Alfred is frowned in hearing Charles opinion.

"If only you bring that search warrant a bit faster, things might be turned out in different way"

Charles is saying so while clicking his lips. Thereupon, the door of the room is knocked for the second time.

"Enter"

"Reis-sama is coming. Since it's in the middle of a meeting, what should I do?"

An errand soldier is stating his business. Thereupon, Charles eyes opened wide.

"What? Lead him to this place immediately. Don't get careless"

The knight leave the room immediately after giving a salute.

"Who's that?"

Alfred asked the identity of the guest.

"My guest. I have been acquaintance with him for a while"

"Even though We were in the middle of discussing military secret?"

Alfred is implying whether it's okay to let an outsider to hear their discussion.

"He is a VIP. I can't treat him carelessly"

Alfred is heaving a sigh when he hear Charles say so with strong tone. Thereupon, the door is being knocked again.

"It's Reis-sama"

"Serve appetizer"

After Charles saying so, the door flung open immediately. And then, a man with slender build entering the room. Reis.

"Hoho, quite a surprise here. Charles-sama. It's been a while since you write a letter for me. How have you been these days?"

Reis is bowing respectfully while putting an insincere smile on his abnormally pale face.

"It's been a while, Reis-dono. You're the same as usual huh. But then, you know that I'm here"

Charles showed a smile as if he is facing against someone he know very well.

"In fact I'm just stopping by this city on the way to the capital. So I planned to send a greeting to the lord of the territory but then I heard that you're in this

place too, CHarles-sama"

"Ooh, how very polite of you. Nevertheless, despite it's our first meeting after such a long time, I'm really busy right now"

"Humph. Could it be that you're currently having an important talk with the knight-dono over there? "

Reis is looking at Alfred while squinting his eyes.

"Yes, he is currently my subordinate. Alfred, introduce yourself to him"

Charles ordered Alfred with good humour.

"This is the first time we meet. I'm the leader of Bertram kingdom Royal Knight, Alfred Emal"

"Ooh, could it be that you're that famous [King of Sword]. I heard the rumor about you being the military personel in Bertram Kingdom"

Reis is quite surprised by that revelation as if affected by such news while offering a handshake.

"You're overestimating me. I'm no more than a knight"

Alfred is being cold but humble while tightly grasping on Reis hand. Thereupon, he is slightly surprised by the corpse-like cold feeling that transmitted from Reis hand.

Reis is showing an eerie smile as he looking at Alfred and then,

"My apologize for the late introduction. I'm working as the ambassador of Proxia empire, Reis. It's pleasure to meet you"

Thus Reis introduced his name.

"Proxia..... Empire"

Proxia empire and Bertram kingdom is forming an alliance at the moment. Thus, it's natural for their ambassador to be in Bertram kingdom.

Though Alfred couldn't help but feels that Reis who standing in front of him is definitely a suspicious person. Though he don't think that it'll be shown in his action or words.

Thus, Reis suddenly starting to speak.

"By the way, I noticed that the situation inside of the city is quite strange, so I'm wondering what was just happened? "

"..... In fact a heavy class criminal just escaped to the area around the city. Though we were strictly watching over the situation of the city, that criminal is escaped from the city last night with someone help"

The current situation of Creia is clearly different. SO replying with nothin happened won't be able to deceive Reis.

So Charles decided to told Reis parts of the truth which doesn't mean so much even if revealed to the 3rd party.

He is trying to hide the matter of the search of Christina by telling Reis about what happened at the south gate.

"Hou, that's sound dangerous. If even Charles-sama and Alfred-sama is moving together, I can just guess just how dangerous that criminal is"

"Yeah, some of our knight already killed on the way of chasing after him. Please be very careful Reis-dono, there's a high chance that criminal might be escaped to the south highway"

"I'm truly obliged for your warning. But, for that criminal to defeat severals official knight. I'm really curious in what kind of person is he"

Reis is admiring the criminal.

"He might be just a bloodthirsty person of an annihilated mercenary gro—"

"Coming into straight conclucion like that is rash"

To Charles who spoke in displeased manner, Alfred who listening silently to their conversation is interposing his words.

"I'm not rash in making such decision! That man is.....! "

Charles is swallowing the cursing words that he almost spit out in fit of rage.

"That man is? "

"..... May have some sort of connection to Lucius"

Charles is muttering those words with embarrassed face.

Thereupon, Reis is muttering an "Oh" as if he just heard an interesting name.

On the other hand, Alfred was bewildered in hearing such unexpected name.

"Lucius? Why his name is coming out in this matter? "

"The rogue who we crossed sword with asked me about Lucius. Whether I know about the man called Lucius"

Alfred is showing a gloomy face in hearing Charles words.

"When it comes to Lucius, the leader of [Griffon] mercenary group also bearing the same name, could it be that they're an acquaintance? "

Reis asked while hiding curious glint in his eyes.

"Is he your acquaintance too, Reis-dono. Well, I mean that person was a former noble of our kngdom after all"

Charles is saying so with awkward manner. Thereupon——、

"..... Hum, it seems I'm trespassing into something. I'm not the kind of boorish erson who will intrude on someone else matter as a 3rd party. Do let me to excuse myself so that I won't become a hindrance in your line of duty"

It's as if he say so to gain some air.

"I'm going to prepare a room in case you want to stay in the city but....."

"No, I must leave immediately since I'm in hurry myself. So please don't worry about it"

"I see..... My deepest apologize for not being able to entertaine you. Let's have a nice and proper talk if we were to meet again later"

"Yes, with pleasure. Well then"

After putting on an empty smile, Reis left the room.



And then, After Reis left.

"Well then, how about searching the south route? Since you say that we have not enough manpower, I don't mind to go alone"

"No. I can't let you to move alone. I'll go with you"

Charles just shrugged Alfred idea.

"You won't believe me huh"

Alfred said those words as a sarcasm.

"Naturally. Because your little sister is involved in this matter"

"..... I become rusty due to my relative. If I were to see Vanessa, let me to deal with her"

"Naturally. Since that's the reason why I summoned you. Use the power that bestowed to you by [King of Sword] for my sake"

Charles is sneering at him while saying so.

"..... Yeah"

Alfred just nodding at him.

"But then, I think you should consider that working with me in this matter will affect the future of earl Emal house. If you ever does something suspicious....."

"..... I understand"

Alfred is surpressing his own feeling as he nodding at Charles who threatening him.



4 figure appeared in the forest around Almond territory.

One of them is Reis who wear black hood. The other three is wearing common adventurers attire.

The other three figure is seemingly talking to Reis——,

"Well then, good luck. Get minimal contact with both parties in order to deal flexibly as soon as possible"

"HA ! "

After Reis gave them an order with indifferent voice, the three then left with each of them taking different direction.

"The name of that rogue huh. It's quite troublesome in how he can kill several knight with ease. Though I'm sure that he isn't send by the person himself....."

Reis who left alone muttering those words.

"Well, the matter of princess Silvi is also take some times, so I'll be waiting for the result. Well then, I guess it's time for me to move soon. Goign back and fro to every place as the middleman is quite troublesome too"

Reis is lightly kicking the ground after saying so. His body is slowly soaring in the air.

He is heading toward west—— Toward the direction where Bertram kingdom capital, Bertrand.



In another place, Galwark kingdom royal capital, Galtouct.

In a certain room inside the upper most part of the tower of royal castle, the room where Skata Hiroaki, the hero of [Restoration].

Sitting on the fine quality sofe with Flora and Roana on both side and Gustave Euguno in front of them.

"Well then, what is the matter that you want to discuss? "

Hiroaki asked duke Euguno about the reason for his visit.

"Yes. In fact, I think that it's about the time for Hiroaki-sama to get married"

Hiroaki is surprisedin hearing duke Euguno remark.

"Me..... Get married? "

"That's right"

Duke Euguno is nodding while wearing a big smile on his face.

"I refuse. I just arrived in this world, it's still too early to get married"

Hiroaki is replying with slightly annoyed tone. For him who born and raised in Japan and just turned 19 years old, the word "Marriage" might be a big burden for him.

"If you say that it's too early to get married, I don't mind if you're engaged to

someone. What do you think? "

"Engaged huh. Well if that is the case, so be it....."

Hiroaki is reluctantly agreeing to it.

"But, why are you suddenly bringing this matter now? "

"In fact, there's many marriage proposal coming from the noble girls for Hiroaki-sama after that evening party"

"Ah, I see. By saying that, you're planning to stop them by announcing about my engagement right"

Hiroaki replied with triumphant look on his face in the middle of duke Euguno explanation.

"How impressive, your insight is as sharp as usual"

"Well, this much is just normal. No need to flatter me like that. By the way, who are you going to engage with me? "

Hiroaki is asking that question while sending a fleeting gaze at Roana and Flora by his side. Because when it comes to his engagement, he thinks that these two who usually act as his manager are the candidates.

In contrast to Flora who fidgets with a tense look on her face, Roana showed a dignified face.

"Since we need a candidate of suitable status as the legal wife of hero-sama, I'm considering of pairing you with Flora-sama"

Duke Euguno is replying eloquently.

"Uhm, what do you think about it, Flora? "

Hiroaki is looking at Flora as he asked that question.

"EH? Ah, yes. I'll do my best! "

Flora's body is twitched and then replying in high spirit.

(Do my best huh. To be honest, as a woman, she is more charming than Roana or Liselotte. And there's that Lilyana who I met a few days ago.. Talking with her is enjoyable, or rather she knows how to be attentive toward men,

her point is off the charts)

Hiroaki is looking at Flora face while silently rating the woman rank inside his head.

(Flora face is perfect but being not talkative herself is her only downside. She have no charm of your usual heroine archtype. But well, this kind of reserved girl is the best as legal wife when it comes to polygamy)

Since the most eyesores when it comes to his relationship with woman is the jealousy from the legal wife—— is what he think.

By now he understand that Flora doesn't have that much self-assertion.

Moreover, despite saying so——

(Well, the princess attribute is also cliché when it came to another world. Their brand value as legal wife is high too. So I might as well as saying that I won't give her to another man)

As expected, it's hard for him to abandoning Flora.

"I don't mind being engaged to FLora as long as she agreed to it"

Hiroaki decided quickly with such light tone.

"Ooh, is that true? "

Duke Euguno is smiling delightfully.

"Ah. But, as for the one who will become my wife later, the decision is up to me. Naturally, though I will hear your idea, you can't nag on me. Since it'll make even more stressful for me"

Thus, Hiroaki is indirectly telling him about his intention.

Since the situation is calling for it, he must remind duke Euguno about this matter—— is his self-argument, since he think that the guy who agree without those promise above is just a fool.

"Certainly. Though I'm feeling grateful for that, I will be the one who receive the above mentioned marriage interview from now if possible....."

"Ah, I see. I don't know that I'm this popular"

Hiroaki is shaking his head in disappointment to duke Euguno who easily yielded to his demand.

"It's just natural for several girls to lining up as your wife as long as we consider Hiroaki-sama charm"

Roana by his side suddenly saying those words.

"Hee, you too huh, Roana? "

Hiroaki is asking with wide grin on his face.

"Didn't I say that already"

Roana sudenly puffing her slightly red cheeks.

(Haha, she is so cute)

Hiroaki is smiling delightfully and then turned toward duke Euguno.

"Well then, a while ago you just mentioned the incoming marriage request regardless of the country, but from which big shot of foreign country these marriage request is coming from? "

"When it comes to big country, there's a request from duke house and several others distinguished houses of Galwark kingdom"

"Hou, when you say duke house of Galwark kingdom, is it from liselotte? "

Hiroaki cheeks is loosened as he asked that question, brimming with expectation.

"No, as for now I'm not receiving any marriage proposal from house of duke Kretia"

"What ? I see....."

Hiroaki is dejected in hearing the reply that coming from duke Euguno.

(Ah, I'll prepare the 2nd or 3rd seat if it's for Liselotte but then, it seems it'll be too late by then)

Hiroaki eyebrows is creased a little as if to say that his interest a bated a little. He isn't pleased in hearing that there's no courting from Liselotte.

"The offer for marriage interview should be increasing from now on. Though

it'll be difficult to meet everyone of them, please feel free to command me since if needed, I myself will personally testing the the candidate even including their pedigree"

Hiroaki is pondering for a while and then saying to duke Euguno.

"Aah, you're right. Well, we received those after various trouble after all. So I should meet all of those candidate even including those who failed due to their parentage isn't it? "

In doing so, he will be in a harem situation as the only man in the venue.

Then he'll choose the girl who he take a liking amongst them—— Is what Hiroaki going to do. Since he might find diamond in the rough amongst them.

"As expected of kind hearted Hiroaki-sama. Well then, I'lll prepare everything in order for us to be able to welcome great number of ladies"

Duke Euguno is bowing respectfully. But, a sneer is appearing on his lips.

Chapter 123: A Meeting In The Inn

Rio is heading toward a certain territory in the west part of earl Claire territory by flying with spirit arts.

To be exact, the reason he was heading toward the opposite direction of Christina-tachi is to purchase necessary goods for travelling in the city where the search operation have yet to reach this place.

He is mainly purchasing food ingredients.

Naturally despite having an enormous amount of food ingredients in his[Item Box], majority of them aren't appearing in the market of Strahl region. Thus he decided to prepare another set of ingredients.

Since majority of them can use magic, there's no problem for fire and supply of water.

Moreover, he also needs to buy clothes and cookware.

Though it was still in the morning, many stores are already open for business after the owner finishes their breakfast to gain the necessary energy for the day.

Though Rio goes for shopping immediately, as expected it's hard even for him to gain necessary goods for six people.

Thereafter, he borrowed a horse to place his luggage and entered a desolate alley, after which he is storing all of the luggage inside the [Item Box].

And since it's right before noon when he finished majority of his shopping list, he left the city without any delay to rush toward their rendezvous point.

A while after traversing the highway, he entering the forest and then took a flight with spirit arts. He isn't facing any kind of trouble along the way and managing to arrive at the rendezvous site, the fountain ahead of time.

Rio decided to leaning his back on the tree that growing beside the fountain. There, he had taken out the goods which he bought for Celia-tachi a while ago

from the item box.

One hour later—— Rio suddenly raised his head to looking at the sky. Thereupon, he sees Aisha descending slowly from the sky.

"Celia-tachi will arrive in a while, Haruto. No one is pursuing them at the moment"

Aisia reported the necessary information to him upon landing on the ground.

"I see. Thank you, Aisia"

"uhn"

Aisia sat beside Rio while replying so. And just like that her head is leaning on Rio's shoulder.

"Tired? "

"Yeah. I'm sleepy"

Aisia replied while closing her eyelids.

"I see, thank you for your hard work. Please sleep till Celia-sensei-tachi arrive"

"Uhn....."

Thus Aisia entered her sleep mode. He can hear her rhythmical sleeping breath.

(She is asleep huh. Well, it's okay)

In fact no one will be able to see her sleeping as long as she changed into her spirit form and sleep inside his body but, Aisia's sleeping face is way too peaceful that he doesn't want to wake her.

Rio's mind also calmed down a lot when Aisia is by his side. In the end Rio decided to let Aisia sleep in that way thinking that he can just wake her up before Celia-tachi arrive.

Meanwhile he scattering a gentle breeze which is infused with his magical power to every direction with spirit arts to search for a hostile party within the range of several hundreds metres in all direction.

The efficiency is better if he used detection type magic barrier in case he is

staying at one place but he can't do that with Aisia leaning on his shoulder.

Nevertheless, since there's almost no spirit arts warrior on Rio's level, he just spends the time enjoying the warm sunlight on his skin.

Thereupon, he sensed the existence which is seemingly Celia-tachi in less than 10 minutes.

"It seems they have come, Aisia"

"..... Uhn"

Her figure suddenly vanished when she called to her. At the same time, he can feel a comfortable and important feeling weighing on his shoulder disappear along with her.

"Haruto! "

A while later, he could see the figure of Christina-tachi along with Celia's voice coming from the path that is from the fountain toward the highway.

"I have been waiting"

Rio is greeting the seemingly wornout group of five with a nonchalant tone.

"..... Even though we were running as fast as we can to come to this place, I wonder how did you overtake us and arrived first? "

Christina asked him with a curious tone.

"It's because I didn't go via highway. And I just finished buying necessary goods for traveling"

Rio's replying in a roundabout way while smiling at her.

"..... I see. Truly reliable"

Christina just showed a resigned smile when she saw several backpacks placed in the surroundings.

"By the way, let's change our clothes for now before we enter the post town. I've prepared traveling clothes for a few people. Please just tell me if those clothes aren't fitting to your size since I'm going to buy new ones"

Currently Christina-tachi are wearing knight uniforms and noble clothes under

their robe.

So their situation will become even more complicated if by some chance they are asked by the soldier who guarding the post town.

"That's right, let's change to our disguise immediately. Vanessa, help me to change my clothes"

Christina said so as she might have realized the advantage of changing their clothes before entering the post town.



"Ooh, beautiful girls are lining up, let's follow them ASAP....."

While the three girls are entering deeper into the forest to change their clothes, one of the two black haired youth is muttering those deplorable words..... In Japanese. Thereupon, the other youth is looking at him with a stunned face.

"Shouldn't we change our clothes too? They're going to return soon you know"

"Kouta, you really can't understand men romance at all huh"

"Romance you say, does it have something to do with changing clothes? "

The youth called Kouta is sending a doubtful look at his senpai while looking at Rio who is standing next to him from the corner of his eyes.

"WRONG ! THE MOST IMPORTANT FACT IS THE FACT THAT BEAUTIES ARE CHANGING THEIR CLOTHES RIGHT THERE! doesn't that fact make your imagination run wild? "

"Please stop such reckless ideas"

Rio who was leaning his back on a tree was looking at their conversation with a wry smile on his face. Thereupon——、

"Kouta, you really are..... You should be able to understand this romance of mine right, Haruto-san? "

So the senpai of Kouta was trying to gauge Rio's reaction.

Kouta is showing a startled face.

"..... Unfortunately I'm with Kouta in this case"

After a brief pause, Rio is replying awkwardly..... In Japanese.

"A-As I thought, so you can speak Japanese can't you? Your given name and family name is also the same case. You're..... A Japanese right? Could it be that you're involved in hero summoning like us too? "

Kouta is throwing one question after another with a shrill voice.

"Calm down"

"Ah sorry"

Kouta suddenly calmed down when Rio told him to do so.

"By the way please change your clothes before they come back. Then let's continue our talk after that"

"Ah, you're right. Understood"

And then, a few minutes later.

"Shall we start with a self-introduction then? I mean after such a messy situation"

Rio proposed that right after Kouta-tachi finished changing their clothes.

By the way they're currently wearing traveling gear.

"That's right. Now that you mention it, we have yet to introducing ourself"

Kouta accepted Rio idea.

"Well then let's start from me. Though you already know about it, my name is Haruto Amakawa. I'm 16 years old this year"

When Rio introduced himself in Strahl region style, Kouta-tachi showed a slightly puzzled face.

But, they have to finish their self introduction first.

".....I see. So you're from the same age as me, or maybe a year younger? I'm Murakumo Kouta. 17 years old"

"In that case you're older than me. I'm turning 16 this year after all Please take care of me"

Rio stretched his hand for a handshake as he say so.

"Nice to meet you"

Kouta also stretched his hand and did a handshake with Rio.

"And then, this person is my senpai, his name is....."

Following that, Kouta is urging his senpai to introduce himself.

"My name is Saiki Rei. Though I'm Kouta's senior by one year, I'm still 17 years old this year. Maybe. I mean I don't even know the date and days of this world. It's nice to meet you"

"Yeah, please treat me well"

Rio also did a handshake with Rei.

"Well then, I think that's enough for self-introduction. Though I want to hear your answer regarding Kouta's question just now"

And, Rei is breaking the ice and going strike to the topic.

"Understood. First, it's true that I can speak in the language you call as Japanese. But I'm native born of this world and not a Japanese"

"Eh.....? "

Rei and Kouta is shocked since they might not expect such a reply coming from Rio.

There, before they have a chance to barrage him with too many question, he decided to explain the situation to stop such things from happening.

"In fact I spent a few months living alongside the people who got themselves involved in hero summoning. Thus I learnt Japanese in the process of teaching them the regional language"

It's already common knowledge that Rio and Miharu-tachi were living under the same roof till just a while ago. There's no merit in feeding them with a lie by this point.

"As expected, another people also summoned beside us huh....."

He changed the course of their interest toward the fact that other people

were also summoned along with us》 away from 《Why he can speak Japanese 》.

"The two of you couldn't understand it huh? "

"Yeah. Anyway, though I learnt the language of this world, it was the best I can do. I have no other way for gathering the information"

"..... By the way, how did the two of you learn the language of this world?"

"For some reason it's spread that we were simply the friend chosen by the hero.. So we do our best to cooperate with him"

"I see"

Well they have no other choice after all. Since they won't live a decent life as long as they can't communicate with the people of this world. They should have been desperate in learning this world's language.

"By the way, there's some something that I want to ask you Haruto-san, is your given name and family name originating from Strahl region? I mean it's extremely similiar to the given name and surname of the place we came from after all"

Kouta is looking at Rio as if to gauge his expression.

"..... This family name and given name originated from the Yagumo region, the birthplace of my deceased parents"

Rio replied after a short pause.

"AH, sorry ! For asking something like that. I thought that it might be a hint to return to our world"

Kouta apologizing with a flustered voice in hearing the fact that his parents is deceased.

"It's okay, don't mind about it. Please stop being so polite"

"There's no way I can do that you know. Yagumo region. I only heard of that name when learning about the geography of this world. Maybe I'll try to go to that place someday. Right, senpai? "

"Yeah, that's sound good. That's sound interesting"

Rei agreed to Kouta who tried to change the topic.

Thereupon, Christina-tachi who just finished changing their clothes are coming back at the same time.

Even those bundles of traveling clothes are looking good on those three.

"They came back huh. Let's continue this talk another day"

"uhn"

Thus Rio-tachi ended their conversation.

"My apologies to make you waiting. We're done with changing our clothes too. Let's just take our time to go into the post town"

Vanessa's suggestion was for all of them to go into the post town which is built along the highway.



"..... This is..... Our lodging? "

Christina is muttering those words while looking at the inn.

The inn is a three floor building— That brings about a historical feeling in it. [TL : It's worn out building] Though it's not that worn out from Rio's perspective, it might be as good as a tattered house from Christina's perspective.

In the first place, Christina who was born and raised as a princess might never have even rested in the inn. Though it's a fairly high-ranked inn amongst the inns in the post town, she was looking at that inn with a dumbfounded expression.

"Though this isn't the best inn, it should be a fairly high-ranked inn amongst the inns in the post town. I know that this inn couldn't satisfy her highnesses demand but please bear with it during our journey"

Rio expressed his apology from Christina's side.

By the way since they can call her by her real name during this journey, they decided to use an alias for Christina. It was for the sake of hiding her real identity.

"I-It's not that I'm dissatisfied by it. That's enough. Let's go inside"

Christina lead their way to enter the inn with a flushed face. Maybe she just feels embarrassed being seen in that appearance when she is looking curiously at the inn.

Rio-tachi is following from her back with a wry smile on their face. After entering the inn, a middle aged man already manned the reception desk.

"We want to book a room in this inn, master. There's six of us"

Maybe because she want to wipe away her shame from before, Christina is starting the negotiation without any awkwardness.

"He hee. Then the cheapest choice is to share a room"

Maybe because he is bewildered by Christina's beauty, the man who is seemingly the shopkeeper replied with a shrill voice.

"Sharing a room? "

"It means that you'll be staying in the same room as the other guests"

Rio is doing an explanation for Christina who has a huge question mark on top of her head.

"..... As expected, I want to be pardoned from that"

Christina replied with a cramped face.

"Yes. In that case let's rent a room for each of us. Master, I want to rent a room which isn't sharing a room but, how much room do you have left? "

Rio is engaging in likeable conversation with the shop keeper. Christina is taking a step back to pass the baton for discussion and then listened to their conversation with a extremely curious face.

"We have but the biggest one is a five person room. Hehe"

The shopkeeper is replying with a business smile plastered on his face. He might have judged Rio-tachi as a good customer.

"Please give us 2 rooms then"

"Yes. The fee is 4 small silver! "

"Here you go. Keep the change"

Rio had taken out a big silver coin and placed it on the counter as he said so.

"EH? "

The shopkeeper is staring at him with a dumbfounded face.

"In fact the two princesses behind me is the daughter of a prosperous merchant house, they're currently traveling incognito. Well though their house is partly recognized, I can't limit the bad guys aiming for them without turning into a brawl. This is my hush money for you to not telling those guys about us. You don't want something troublesome to happen too right, master? "

Rio is whispering those words with a bone chilling tone as he brings his face closer to the shopkeeper. Thereupon the shopkeeper put on an even brighter smile.

"Hehehehe. I-Is that was the case. Hehe, I won't say anything to anyone who comes for it. Hehe"

"Yeah, please do so. It's the best for both of us after all. You have no need to worry about anything as long as you lend your place"

"In that case, what about meal? The bread and cheese is free of charge. Wine and beer is another matter though"

"You're right, please let me to borrow your kitchen for a bit since I'm going to cook for them"

"Yes. Feel free to use the kitchen"

"My apologies for this.. Thank you very much"

"It's nothing. Your room is on the second floor, two from the end on the right. Please enjoy your room"

The shopkeeper said so as he let out an ear to ear smile while looking at the shining big silver coin.

"Yes"

Rio is nodding at his words and then turning around to his companion,

"I got the room. Please follow me"

Saying so, he is heading toward the assigned room.

Thereupon――、

"This is a five person room? The bed is just for four people right! Moreover, there's no internal lock! "

Christina voiced out those shriek like words when they entered the room.

Lining up inside of the room is one wooden table and four beds made of the same material.

The humble looking bed is almost to the point of crude when compared to the custom made bed which she always used to sleep back in the royal castle.

"I never said that it is one person per bed. It's enough for 5 people if they're lining up sideways"

"..... You're kidding, right? "

Christina is staring at Rio's face with a flabbergasted look.

"Unfortunately I'm not. There's only these beds but they're quite good you know"

Rio is saying so with a wry smile on his face.

Certainly when comparing this inn with those inns of major cities, the quality is actually below average.

But, this place is a post town which serves as the relay point during journey so this inn is definitely amongst the best in this town.

Though this city does have an inn for wealthy people, those inns will definitely have some sort of connection with the ruling class.

Considering the fact that they'll be traced easily as long as they use that kind of place during their journey, thus they decided to use this kind of inn.

"We'll excuse ourself then. Though our room is opposing to each other, please try your best to not leave the room. Since it'll be troublesome if we're involved with a strange fella"

Beauties on the level of Celia and Christina will inevitably be wooed by some nasty fella.

Since he has to prepare for the dinner, Rio decided to leave the room along with the two other youths. But,

"W-Wait a minute! How do you allocate the room? "

Celia is calling to Rio in panic.

"I'm considering the plan to separate between boys and girls but....."

Rio replied with a curious tone as he feels that maybe there's some inconvenience in his way.

"D-Don't you need a guard, your highness? This room has no lock"

Celia is proposing that plan with a anxious voice.

She stayed at the inn in Galwark kingdom along with Miharu-tachi before but that inn were the kind where they're attentive on the safety of their guest. In contrast, she might have received a light culture shock in seeing this inn.

".....You're right. Certainly. Vanessa is just being anxious"

It seems Christina is also sympathizing with Celia.

But then, one of the three men must be in the women's room.

Christina who never slept with men except for her father couldn't help but feel slight resistance toward it.

"It's all right. Though we'll be in a different room, I can guarantee that no bad fella will make trouble"

Rio's telling her so with a calm tone.

But, Christina trembled due to disgust just by imagining a stranger male coming into the room.

"Uhm, if possible I want lord Amakawa to staying in this room with us"

"EH? Me? But....."

Rio is bewildered as he never expected to hear those words from Christina.

Even when he lived along with Miharu-tachi in the rock house, Rio never slept in the same room with Celia. It's not like that was impossible or he feels nervous as long as it's sharing a bed by sleeping next to each other.

He's looking at Vanessa with a troubled face and then she nodded to him.

(What is the meaning of that nod just now.....)

Rio felt a cold sweat on his back since he can't find any excuse to refuse her. A lone man won't be able to sleep amongst the ladies of nobility and royalties since it'll make them feel uncomfortable.

"Thus, is it okay if the two of you using the other room? "

Christina is continuing while ignoring Rio's anxiety.

"KuH, this discrimination solely for ikemen! Unforgiveable....."

"S-Senpai. Please stop doing something that will embarrass me"

When Rei muttered those words, Kouta hurriedly tried to warn him.

"No, this might be a cliché"

Kouta is dropping his shoulder in hearing such a reply from Rei.

"Ikemen? What is that? "

Christina asked that question maybe because she could hear Rei.

"AH, uhm, a man..... with extremely excellent appearance"

Kouta is awkwardly explaining the simple meaning of that word. Thereupon, Christina unintentionally chuckled in hearing that.

"Ah, so that's the meaning. Lord Amakawa is definitely far more attractive

amongst the three of you"

"P-Please don't say that right in front of us. Kouta"

"Senpai, please stop acting like that already....."

Kouta is hanging his head down in embarrassment



Two hours later.

On the desk in the room where Christina-tachi is staying at, many dishes were lining next to each other along with wooden tableware.

Each of the dishes such as salad that were dressed beautifully and the soft and tender beef stew that will make one drool just by seeing it.

"These dishes really are fragrance right. I never thought that this kind of delicious looking dishes will come out"

Christina is saying so while smiling happily. Her body which exhausted by constant movement might be really craving for a sumptuous meal.

"I don't know whether these dishes will be to your palate but. Please enjoy"

Everyone begining their meal at once with Rio words as the signal. Kouta and Rei is muttering "Itadakimasu" in low voice.

They immediately raising a joyful voice once they taste the dishes.

"UWAAA! Delicious, too delicious!!! Haruto-kun! It might be even more delicious than the dishes served in the castle! "

Kouta's eyes glittered with excitement the moment he tried the beef stew that has been cooked till it became soft and tender.

"Thank you very much. Since everyone should be tired from that kind of journey, I made the seasoning on the stronger side"

Rio is saying so with a embarassed face.

"Fumu, your skill might be equal to the chef in the castle. Though I'm rather disappointed with the bread supplied by this inn, it's surprisingly a perfect match with this stew"

"Yes. Our belly is full and the fatigue of the day is also blown away"

Vanessa isn't holding back with her praise and even Christina nodding with a satisfied face.

"Ufufu"

Rio is the one who is being praised by everyone but Celia who sat next to him is the one who feels proud instead.

"Very much appreciated. Vanessa's dishes are also delicious but rather than dynamic flavor, it has a bland taste"

Christina is smiling happily as she glanced at Vanessa.

"I-I'm a knight, so I was never taught any dish to eat in the battlefield"

Vanessa is blushing in hearing those words.

Such lively dinner going on till it's bedtime.



And then, the next morning.

(Haruto, the morning will come anytime now. Wake up)

Rio is woken up by Aisia who is staying in his body in her spirit form.

When he opened his eyes, the scenery of dimly lit unknown ceiling in the darkness is reflecting in his vision.

(Thank you Aisia)

After saying his gratitude, Rio flipped his quilt blanket and about to get up.

(N ?)

He felt a faint weight on his right arm, when he turned to see the cause. He saw Celia tightly grasped on his sleeve.

Her calm sleeping face is extremely innocent and can easily be mistaken as someone younger or of the same generation as Rio.

(She's unexpectedly gripping strongly on my sleeve)

Though it's not like he doesn't consider the option of forcefully tearing off

Celia's hand that is tightly grasped on Rio's sleeve, he decided to wake her up.

"Please let go of my sleeve, Cecilia"

"Huu....."

Though she moaned lightly, in the end she raised the same cute sleeping breath again. There's no sign of her waking up.

"Cecilia. By all means please. Let go off my sleeve"

Rio's trying to waking up Celia for the second time.

(Come to think of it, sensei is weak in the morning)

He's recalling that it's almost impossible to wake up Celia in the morning.

Then he decided to lightly shake her small shoulder from above the quilt.

Swayingswaying.

"Uhn? "

Celia is showing a small reaction while letting out such a drowsy voice.

"Cecilia. Have you woken up? "

"Uhn, I woke u~p"

Celia's eye blinking repeatedly as she mumbled those words.

"Good morning"

It seems she's still in dreamland but, since she can understand his intention, she greeted Rio who woke her up.

"Uhm, Rio. M'rni~ng"

Celia is smiling delightfully when she saw Rio from her slightly opened eyes. The reason why she calls him "Rio" might be because she's still half asleep.

Rio looked at Christina-tachi in panic but he heaved a relieved sigh seeing that they're still asleep.

Thereupon, Celia immediately crept out from the quilt and hugged Rio's body.

"WHA, Cecilia? "

Rio is startled.

“My situation is even worse than before right?”

Celia wore nothing but cute negligee under her quilt.

She has a petite and dainty figure but her body is still that of a proper woman's body, her body temperature and the soft feeling of her body making direct contact with his body.

"Nfufufu!"

Celia's closing her eyes again with a delightful smile on her face while rubbing her face to Rio's body.

"Uhm, Cecilia. Please..... Wake up. Very please"

Rio's pleading with a somewhat flustered voice.

Seizing Celia's shoulder, he then jolted it a bit stronger than before.

Thereupon, Celia's consciousness awakened bit by bit and now her eyes are fully open.

Celia's staring at Rio's face from point blank range and then her body stiffened for a while. A while later— —,

"..... Fue~? "

Celia's startled.

"W-W-W-W-Why are you in this place, Rio? "

Celia's lips is flapping as if she lost her cool.

Rio is smiling wryly and decided to explain the situation to her.

"Good morning. didn't we decide yesterday that I'll sleep in this room as a guard? I tried to wake you up but..... It seems you're still half asleep"

"I-I see. So that was what happened"

Celia finally recalling the discussion last night which decided that she'll sleep with Rio.

"And, please be careful when calling my name"

Rio quietly whispering in Celia's ears.

"Ah, S-Sorry! "

"No, I should be the one who is apologizing"

Rio's apologizing with a awkward voice in seeing Celia apologizing with a blushing face.

"P-Please stop that. Since I was the one at fault for being half asleep"

Celia said so while fidgetting restlessly.

If the other party is a strong willed girl, she might have slapped him for unjustified reason and cursed at him with unspeakable words.

"No, that's....."

Rio feels relieved—— In the fact that Celia is a calm and composed girl.

Thereupon, Celia who being bashful on his chest can be seen as an angel, thus he can't help but smile at her.

"W-What's with that smile! "

Celia's cheeks became even redder and it goes without saying that Christina-tachi had already woken up due to their commotion.

Chapter 124: Journey Toward Restoration

A while before Rio and Celia's arrival in earl Claire territory. The private room of the 1st princess of Saint Stellar kingdom, Lilyana.

Lilyana called Miharuru after clearing out the people in the vicinities.

The two of them were sitting on chairs facing at each other. If one were to ask about their business right now,

"You want to learn Japanese? "

Despite that she nodded to that question, Miharuru's tilting her head in wonder.

Because she can't find the exact reason for Lilyana wanting to learn Japanese language. Because this world doesn't have the Japanese language.

"Though our kingdom hasn't confirmed any other people who are involved in hero summoning except for Miharuru-san-tachi, it doesn't mean that they won't appear in the future. Thus we thought that it's better to at least have one person who can speak the language of another world. Will you grant my request? "

Maybe because she can guess Miharuru's doubt, Lilyana's explaining her reason with a polite tone.

"In that case, it's my pleasure to help you"

As for why she easily agreed to Lilyana's request without probing even deeper is might be because she agreed to her intention.

"Thank you very much. And then, in fact I wish that the fact I'm learning the Japanese language from Miharuru-san will be kept as a secret from others including Masato-kun and Aki-chan"

Lilyana's wishing for that. Thereupon Miharuru became even more curious.

"I'll learn it within the shortest time to surprise everyone you see"

Continuing so, Lilyana's showing a smile filled with meaning.

Though Miharuru could sense a slight change in Lilyana's expression, she couldn't surmise the deep meaning behind that slight change.

"I see..... Understood"

"With this Miharuru-san is my teacher. Please take care of me"

Lilyana is bowing to Miharuru with a awkward manner while putting on a deceitful smile.

"Tea-..... Cher? Me..... To Lilyana-sama"

Miharuru said those words in a high-pitched voice. When being called as a teacher, she could feel a great responsibility upon her shoulder. All the more when her student is the 1st princess herself.

"There's no need to be so formal about it, will you accompany me for a tea time as a friend? "

"I-I'll do my best"

Lilyana unintentionally chuckled in seeing Miharuru show such a tense expression.

"Well then, please come to my room at the same time as today starting from tomorrow. As for the reason for your visit, is it alright with you to write it as "To learn more about your work under guidance of Fril, my exclusive attendant"? "

"Yes. Since I've got nothing to do before and after meal time"

Miharuru volunteered herself to look after Masato and Aki but currently she has not that much work except for mealtime.

It seems Lilyana is also making that request based on that circumstance.

"Well then, our lesson will only start from tomorrow but please treat me well. I'll send Fril as my messenger"

Lilyana's saying so while glancing at Fril.

"Please treat me well. Miharuru-sama"

Fril is bowing respectfully to Miharuru.

"N-No, please treat me well too! "

Miharu suddenly stood up from her chair and then bowed to Fril.

"By the way, taking this occasion, will you accompany me for a cup of tea? I want to have a proper conversation with Miharu-san afterall"

After that, Miharu decided to deepen her friendship with Lilyana by drinking tea with her.



Two day has passed after Rio's rendesvous with Celia-tachi at the spring near the post-town.

They're currently travelling toward the south direction traversing the south highway which stretched from the capital of earl Claire territory, Creia.

They should be able reach the checking station after advancing a bit more. After that the checking station by traversing via mountain regions, they'll arrive at the junction highway which will lead them toward the east.

But, Rio-tachi won't go through the checking station, they suddenly changed their route and entered the mountain and forest path which spread far on the side of the highway.

They're travelling in formation with Vanessa as the vanguard, Kouta right behind her, and then following by Christina and Celia, with Rei and Rio as rear guard.

"Uhm, is it really okay to be straying away from the highway? "

After they went into the trackless forest route, Kouta asked that question while looking at the surrounding.

It's currently spring season and still in the morning but, since the sunlight hardly passes through the densely growing forest, it's still dim and cool.

"Since at this rate, we were going to meet a checking station if we keep following the highway you know. And since we were on the run, the inspection should have reached that checking station by now. In worst case, the route is closed right now so the best choice it is to avoid that checking station isn't it? "

Christina's doing the explanation from behind him.

"I-I see. But inside the forest is still dangerous....."

Maybe those dim vegetation turned Kouta into a timid person.

"Of course it's dangerous. We might lose our way and frequently encountering wild beast or demon. But, be at ease. We'll make a detour toward the highway after bypassing the checking station"

Though Vanessa heard the conversation from the vanguard position, she supplemented the explanation without even looking back.

Though her action is natural since they were currently on a completely trackless route separated from highway.

And then, she deliberately left out the part of how dangerous the act of travelling in this trackless route which strayed away from the highway.

Traveling on the trackless route alone is already taking a great deal of time and stamina, and can easily make them lose their way.

And that's coming along with the risk of being ambushed by the wild beasts and demons just as told by Vanessa.

Moreover, though their fighting power aren't that high, living things such as poisonous snakes and leeches which exist in great number in the forest is something that is extremely troublesome to deal with.

"W-Wild beast and demon....."

Kouta is gulping his saliva.

"We can still go back to the highway but, do you want to go back to the castle? "

Christina who couldn't stand Kouta's wimpy attitude is asking that question to him.

"N-No, I have no intention to go back to the castle. I chose to leave the castle on my own after all"

Kouta is frowning as he said those words. Christina is suddenly squinting her eyes.

"Right. In that case, please brace yourself. The sword that is hanging on your hip isn't a mere decoration you know. Though we have lord Amakawa and Vanessa, you must fight for yourself when things turn for the worst"

".....Yes"

Kouta is nodding in hearing her words. His profile became less gloomier than a while ago as if he lost quite chunks of his fear.



"Christina-sama. Let's take a rest around this area. I found a water source nearby"

Vanessa proposed to take a rest after finding a small spring which is suitable for their resting place in the forest. It's just right in the noon. And just the right time for their stomach to start grumbling.

"Since it'll be boring to have a lunch as it is, I'll do a simple meal using the ingredients in our stocks. Celia-ojousama. Will you help me conjure water with magic? "

So Rio's suggesting to make simple dishes.

"Yeah. I can but..... Will you stop with that "ojousama"? Something in that name made me really embarrassed. Or rather, why are you suddenly calling me in that way?"

Celia's rebutting in that why with a embarrassed expression.

"..... But, how should I call you then? "

Rio's asking her with a troubled face while glancing at Christina-tachi.

In fact Rio wasn't very good in keeping some distance with Celia in front of Christina-tachi. Thus he keeps reminding himself to keep some distance with Celia before arriving at this place.

"T-That's, Hey. You can just call me [Celia] like how you did normally"

Celia replied with a slightly embarrassed face. Thereupon, Rio's showing a subtly bewildered face.

"Like how you did normally? But"

When addressing her without honorific, Rio decided to call her with her alias, [Cecilia].

But, when he addressed her with her real name, [Celia], he usually added [Sensei] after her name.

And yet, even if she says [Just like usual], the [Usual] actually never happened.

But——,

"L-Listen! Look! Otherwise I won't conjure water for you! "

Celia kept rattling with slightly flushed cheeks.

".....I Understood. Then, Celia. The water please"

Smiling wryly, Rio's yielding to her. Thereupon, Celia's smiling delightfully.

Christina-tachi is secretly looking curiously at their exchange.

"Yosh, now take out the pot! "

When Celia said so, Rio replied with "Yes" and then lowered the backpack on his back to the ground.

And then proceeded to detach the pot that is fixed on his backpack with rope and placed it in front of Celia.

"Please then"

"Yeah. 《Create Water》"

Celia's reciting the aria while holding her palm on top of the pot. Thereupon, a small magic formation appeared from her palm. The water then flowed toward the pot just like when it's coming out from a faucet.

After simply washing the pot with water, he filled the pot with water for the second time. It's filled with enough water in a mere 10 seconds.

"Please wait a minute. I'll make a simple kitchen table for you《Earth Wall》"

Celia's placed her hands on the ground and then recited the chant.

A magic formation arises from the ground in front of her and then followed by the ground protruding upward in a rectangular shape.

"You're as skillful as usual in using your magic"

Rio praised her.

Though the user of 《Earth Wall》 magic can control the shape, durability and the size of the earth wall by controlling their magical power, to make the earth wall similar to the one created by Celia just now isn't as simple as looking at it.

Since magic is developed for the sake of combat and not for something as trivial as cooking.

A minute detail like this is more suited for spirit arts. Since spirit arts isn't bound by limitation called magic equation like magic.

"Leave it to me. Even though I look like this, I was a lecturer of magic and have quite a high ranking in my achievements in that area"

Celia's replying with a slightly proud face. Maybe she's happy to be able to help Rio.

"Thank you very much. Since I'm the one who cooks, will you help me with making chairs and a table with everyone? Since you'll be able to take a rest after finishing making that"

"Yeah, leave it to me! "

Celia's nodding with a delighted face as she's trotting happily.

Rio then took out 2 thin metallic plates from his backpack. Each of its surfaces was engraved with the same magic equation.

After placing the metallic plates on top of the kitchen table made by Celia, his hand quickly seized the pot and placing it on top of one of the metallic plates.

After placing several magic stone around the plate, the plate then releasing a light as it's absorbing the magical power of the magic stones and then releasing heat in return. By the way, this plate is a magic tool which the heat can be adjusted by adjusting the number of magic stones.

When he took out the ingredients and frying pan from his backpack, the cooking preparation is complete.

Using the time till the water in the pot is boiling, Rio started to cook.

First he diced the edible mushroom which he picked along the way inside of the forest and then tossing it along with vegetable oil and spices into the frying pan.

After the water in the pot is boiling, he throws the sliced jerky into the boiling pot. After carefully stir-frying the mushroom in the frying pan, he set it aside on a plate.

And then, not long after Rio commenced his cooking——,

"You're skillful at this aren't you"

Christina suddenly called from behind with an admiring face.

"Yeah, since it's useful in various ways during a long journey. Please wait for a while with everyone since it'll be done soon"

Rio's replying while glancing at her. Nonetheless, he tried to indirectly end the conversation since he didn't feel like to do so.

But, Christina who isn't leaving,

"Thank you very much. I'm truly grateful for you"

Suddenly saying her gratitude to Rio.

"Well it's nothing, I'm just going along with the flow. Don't worry about it"

Rio's shaking his head in denial as if saying it in a hard way. Since Rio will go all the way and do everything to help Celia, saving Christina is just the end of the result.

"It's for Celia-sensei right? "

Christina asked that question frankly.

".....Yes. That's right"

Rio paused for a while and then nodded at her. Thereupon——、

"..... I see"

Christina's expression darkened a bit.

Rio who focused on the dishes in front of him failed to notice her expression. Rio isn't starting a conversation voluntarily and just cooking the dishes in silent.

Thereupon, the silence persisted for a while.

But then, Christina won't leave that place. She's just silently staring at the back of Rio who is still in the middle of cooking.

(Does she want to talk about something?)

Rio who feels Christina's gaze on his back at a fixed distance felt slightly uncomfortable by her gaze.

Nevertheless, the dishes is about to be cooked. He's currently cooking the rolled oats with a frying pan along with hot water.

He can't let a momentary distraction spoil the dishes.

Well, maybe he doesn't need to be so conscious about it more than this—
So he decided to continue the cooking with a nonchalant face. But,

"By the way, what is the name of that dish? "

Christina asked that question as if trying to start a conversation. Though slightly bewildered by it, Rio decided to answer her question.

"It's a variety of the dish called gruel"

"Gruel? "

Christina is standing right beside Rio and peering curiously at the content of the frying pan.

She's elegantly raising her long hair which stretches till her shoulder with her right hand and then a gentle fragrance is drifting into Rio's nasal cavity.

"Since it's not the kind of dish that's popular amongst the nobilities, it's not impossible for you to not know about it. After cooking the rolled oats with oil in

frying pan, it is then cooked together with hot water"

"Such a nice fragrance. It's appetizing"

Christina's lips formed a smile after she sniffed the fragrance of the dishes.

"I can't make it too elaborate since it's outdoor cooking and I don't know whether the taste is to your palate but..... It's done"

Rio's throwing the stir fried mushroom which he set aside in the beginning while saying so. Sprinkling chopped cheese on top of it, and the barley cheese risotto is complete.

Next he has the soup that's made of jerky, mushroom and wild herbs which he made while making use of the time during making the risotto. This might be considered as a feast for dishes that's cooked outdoor in the middle of a journey.

"That's not true. It's delicious"

"Thank you very much. Shall we eat this dish over there"

Everyone already prepared a splendid place for a meal under Celia's guidance while Rio is out for cooking the dish. Maybe she's quite proficient with earth magic since there's a simple dining table and chairs.

"Let me help you carry the dishes then"

After saying so, Christina seized the handles of the pot with the soup inside faster than Rio tried to stop her. Thus they're carrying the dishes to the table where Celia-tachi is waiting for them.

(She..... Helped me?)

Rio thought so while absentmindedly looking at Christina's back.

☆☆☆☆☆☆

"After this I'm going to confirm the situation in the area while confirming our direction. I'll be back in around 30 minutes"

Right after they finished their lunch, Rio who said those words immediately vanished inside the forest.

"Aisia, can you stand watch in this area to confirm whether there's dangerous

beasts or demons around? Please drive them away before they cause any harm if they come to attack"

Rio's talking to Aisia who is still in her spirit form and can't be seen by the naked eyes of Christina-tachi.

Thereupon, Aisia materialized herself.

"Yeah, I can"

"Thank you. Aishia"

Rio is smiling gently while he bowed lightly to Aisia.

Thereupon, Aisia tilted her head in return. Maybe because she doesn't know why he said his gratitude to her and yet—— She still says.

"..... Shall we go to live in seirei no tami village once this journey has ended?"

When Rio noticed that she said those words to him.

There's Dryad in seirei no tami village. If it's her, she might know something about Aisia.

Though that was something that should be done immediately, he couldn't help but postpone it up till now due to the matter of protecting Miharu-tachi and then escorting Celia to her home.

He is always the one who received favor from Aisia but it doesn't mean that she lends him something either, so he wants to at least do something for her.

Thus he thought that it might be a good idea to bring her to seirei no tami village since he can't find anything to repay her kindness.

"Seirei no tami is the village..... Where the important people of Haruto is residing right? "

"Yeah. You're right"

"Then, I want to go there"

Aisia is nodding at him.

"I see. I'll introduce everyone to you then"

Though half-year have yet to pass by since the last time he visited seirei no

tami, it feels like more than half-year for him.

In the first place, Rio is returning to Strahl region to get the clue regarding Lucius's whereabouts.

And yet, his search has yielded almost no progress up till now.

Though he tried to get the information regarding Lucius whereabouts from a nearby city ever since he lived along with Miharu-tachi, he didn't get any information regarding Lucius's whereabouts. For some reason he isn't appearing in the front stage lately.

"Well Strahl region is vast and there's numerous people living in there." He originally expected that it'll be extremely difficult to find Lucius.

Though there's a sense of duty instilled inside of him to kill Lucius if that person is alive, it'll be fine if it turned out that Lucius is already dead. Since he has no intention to go crazy about finding that man to the point of losing sight of his surroundings.

Therefore, Rio isn't being impatient while keeping a terrifyingly cold flame of vengeance inside himself.

"I'll leave first then. Our time is running out right"

"Yeah. See you"

Sent off by Aisia, Rio then kicked the ground. Running through the sea of trees like a wind and then ascending in the blink of an eye after finding a suitable height.

Then he floated even further with spirit arts to look for the next post town for their next stop while confirming their position and direction.

(If it's that place, we will be able to arrive before nightfall as long as we don't lose our way. Camping outside might prove to be too much for everyone's stamina)

Rio discovered a post town he is looking for ahead of the highway after passing the checking station.

If they were to lose their way inside the forest, then they have no choice but to camp outside for today. Though there's preparation to be done, he wanted

to stay in the inn as much as possible for Celia's sake.

Since they won't waste too much time by doing so. Rio decided to descend from the tree.

Then he continued to weave his way through the trees to look for a route with good footing.

He also didn't forget to get rid of dangerous beasts or demons he meets along the way.

After running inside of the forest for around 20 minutes, now he decided to go back to the place where Celia-tachi is taking a brief rest by flying in the air. The time required for him to go back was a third of the required time for him to run inside the forest.

Rio then landed nearby and walked towards the temporary camp.

(It should be along this river..... Are you there, Aisia?)

Rio sent a telepathic message since he feels that Aisia might be nearby. She should be able to reply immediately if she were within the range of telepathic message.

(Yes. I'm at the fountain near the temporary camp. You should be able to find the place as long as you follow the river)

(I see. I'll be there)

Since he received a reply from Aisia, Rio just walked along the river without thinking too much about it.

Since he found a deep thicket at the destination place along the river, he's pushing his way through it. After walking for a while, he finds himself in a open space. The fountain.

And two naked beauties——,

"..... EH?"

Rio's train of thought came to a halt in seeing such unexpected view. He unintentionally let out a dumbfounded voice.

Their beautiful long hair is growing all the way till their back with the first one

have snow like color and the second one have orchid like color. In short, they were Celia and Christina.

Celia's beautiful fairy-like figure is in contrast with Christina's long and beautiful sculpture-like figure. Rio was standing still at his place with a dumbfounded expression for a while.

Thereupon——、

(Haruto)

Rio's startled when Aisia suddenly talked to him via telepathic message. He then turned around in a hurry. There he saw the materialized Aisia.

He then glanced at the fountain again in hurry. Fortunately, Christina-tachi have yet to notice him.

(L-Let's change place for now. Follow me, Aisia)

Rio's bringing Aisia along with him to leave that place in a hurry.

(Please don't take a bath at that kind of place mind you.....)

While saying that line in his mind.



After meeting with Aisia, Rio's returning to where Rei and Kouta are waiting for him.

"What are you doing? "

Rio's asking the two of them when he finds them trying to slip into the thicket that's growing around the fountain.

"E, AH! H-Haruto-kun! Y-You're mistaken! I'm just trying to stop senpai from doing such a foolish action! "

Kouta's explaining the situation in a panic. Rei on the other hand just laughed awkwardly with "Ahaha". It seems it's just an attempt.

Rio's shocked and unintentionally heaved a sigh. However, though it's just by accident, seeing that he already saw the bare skin of those two young and high class noble girls, he thinks that he has no qualification to blame or condemn them.

"I won't say that going as far as betting your life on the line for peeping is a wise choice. I recommend you fall back before you're caught by Vanessa-dono"

"Aah, as expected, I won't say as far as betting your life on the line right"

Rei is telling that to Rio with a honest expression.

"Unfortunately, the life of the people in this world is extremely cheap at times"

Rio reply was an unusual one.



Time is going back a little, when Rio-tachi left territory capital of Creia.

The stage is changed to Bertram kingdom royal castle. In a certain post town at the territory south of earl Claire territory.

Because the area surrounding this post town is being surrounded by mountains and the highway going pass through the valley, the town is positioned at the point which must be passed if one were travelling by foot.

The population of the post town is around 200 people but then more than double of that number, even at the lowest traffic, always certainly staying in the inn. There's a shop and inn built along the highway, naturally bars are also amongst those buildings——

"KAAAAA~H! Nothing can beat a beer after a day of hard work! Ou, you guys! Today is my treat. Drink to your fill! "

"It's nothing but cheap beer though! "

"What are you talking about. This cheap beer isn't good enough! "

"Naturally! "

The adventurers who finished their daily work around the post town was gathered inside of this bar. Inside of the bar is filled with vulgar laughter.

Generally the majority of adventurers are ruffians such as them. Naturally there's good people amongst them too but the behaviour of the people with low morale is more conspicuous.

Nonetheless, those aspects can't be helped to a certain extent.

Though there's countless adventurers no matter where one goes to, their range of activity is surprisingly quite narrow. And then, from the fact that they were living a life in confined space where power dominates, the conception such as "Strong people are great" or "Losers are weak" is already common sense for them. As long as one isn't showing their might even if it's just for show, one will be put in lower rank from the surrounding people and even lose their trust.

For that reason, the big adults are surprisingly easy to be involved in a quarrel with a silly reason such as "Can't stand his look", "That person making fun of me", or "Arrogant behaviour".

They'll go as far as picking a quarrel with a weak looking newcomer without batting an eyelid for the sake of showing off to their comrades and the surroundings.

"N? "

When those adventurers are already dead drunk, the door of the bar suddenly opened. The gaze of those adventurers in the bar are pulled towards the door.

An adventurer-like man entered the bar. He's wearing leather armor, donned a traveling mantle and hung a sword on his waist. His age is around the first half of his twenties.

"Ah? A new face huh"

The man who treated liquor to everyone muttered such words.

It's not like adventurers from other places never pass by this post town.

But, many adventurers who are active in this territory were gathering in this bar.

When one stepped their foot in the land of aboriginal adventurer who have strong sense of their turf, the newcomers usually one of the three of "A newcomer who is going to make this place as their base of operation", "They came just to pick a fight" or "A fool who visited a bar without knowing anything".

But then, the newcomer doesn't care about everyone else's gaze and just sat on the counter seat with a ambition filled expression.

"Beer and meat dish please"

The man placing 3 big copper coins on the counter and then ordered liquor and dish. Thereupon, the others adventurer in the bar were glaring at him with a scornful look on their face.

"Y-Yes"

The shopkeeper who guessed the dangerous air inside of the bar is replying with a shrill voice.

And then, the man who treated everyone with liquor is exchanging glances with a few other people and then standing from his seat at once. Those adventurers then sat on the nearby chair as if surrounding that man.

"Yo, Lad. You have some guts there, aren't ya. Ordering like that without even sending a greeting to us first. Did you came to this bar to get used to the adventurers to make this city town as your base of operation? "

The man who treated liquor to everyone circling his arm around the newcomers shoulder and then asked that question while wearing a provocative smile on his face.

"Yeah, that's right. I happened to have a comission for you guys"

The newcomer responded with a nonchalant voice.

"Ah, a comission? Can't you just give that to the guild? "

Those adventurers were startled with the talk that came to a unexpected direction.

"There's usually no branch guild in this kind of rural area right? "

"Yeah, but still..... Is that the kind of job that won't pass through the staying member? "

For once, even in a place without a adventurer guild branch, the guild usually dispatches their staying member for mediation and management job to the post town with a certain level of population. And then, this staying member is a

temporary worker in this post town.

"That means the remuneration is great. This is the prepayment if you are to receive this job. I'll pay three times of this amount as long as the result is to my satisfaction"

Saying so, the man placed a pouch filled with big silver coins on top of the counter.

"T-Three times of this? "

The nearby adventurers who saw that pouch filled with big silver coins become restless. Everyone inside of the store instantly knew "That must be a heap amount of silver coin".

"..... I want to hear about your origin"

The adventurer who treated liquor to everyone is asking with a elated expression.

"That's only if you take this job"

"In that case, please tell me the content of the job. Though I knew that the payment is good, I won't take a commission without knowing the details"

Being able to manage the risk is the sign that he is some sort of veteran adventurer.

"Well, I'm just looking for someone——"

The newcomer then put on a dubious smile

"——And the problem is I don't know what they look like"